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## **Overview Report on Tolerance and Cultural diversity Concepts and Practices in Italy**

Maurizio Ambrosini  
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University of Milan

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Country Synthesis Reports**



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**ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

# **Overview Report on Tolerance and Cultural diversity Concepts and Practices in Italy**

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**UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI MILANO**

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Cultural Diversity in Europe**

**D5.1 Country Synthesis Reports on Tolerance and  
Cultural diversity - Concepts and Practices**

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Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion:  
Responding to the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Europe**  
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## **Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)**

**ACCEPT PLURALISM** is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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The Department of social and political studies was founded as the Department of Sociology in 1983. In 2000 it assumed its new name of the Department of Social and Political Studies in order to recognise and emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of the Department, which incorporates teachers and researchers right across the social sciences and political disciplines (sociology, political sciences, psychology, political philosophy, anthropology and organization studies).

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## **Executive Summary**

This report deals with the issue of cultural and religious diversity in Italy, and aims to find out how and to what extent these diversities are accommodated within Italian society.

Italy became a unified nation only 150 years ago, after a long process of unification. This process was an annexation carried out by the Piedmont State, and it was supported by some elite and bourgeois groups but opposed – or borne with considerable indifference – by the working classes. The development of a national identity, with a common language, was also turbulent because of the territorial fragmentations and the many dialects spoken throughout the country. After the Second World War, the Italian state then had to deal with the secessionist tendencies of various border regions, where linguistic minorities (such as the French in Valle d'Aosta or the Germans in Trentino) asked for more autonomy.

It was only after several decades that the Italian state began dealing with the linguistic minorities by guaranteeing them a certain autonomy and the protection of their rights. The regions where these minorities live obtained a “special statute”, which guarantees them greater autonomy and privileged economic treatment. In 1999 the process of recognition was completed by law 482, which recognised and protected 12 historical linguistic minorities in the Italian territory.

A second set of problems was the management of relations with the Catholic church and other religious minorities. Catholicism is the main religion in Italy and relations with the Italian state were regulated by the Lateran Treaty (1929). After the revision of the Treaty in the 1980s, Catholicism was removed as the religion of the state, and since then the Italian governments began to sign various agreements with other religions, such as the Waldesian and the Methodist Church (1984), the Adventist Church, the Assemblies of God (1986), and the Jewish Council (1987). The freedom of religion and the rights of religious denominations to organize themselves were, however, guaranteed by the Italian Constitution (art. 19 and art. 8). Catholicism still remains the main religion in Italy and is part of the national identity, even though its importance has decreased in the last few decades.

Despite some difficulties, the Italian state has managed to accommodate rights and claims of native and religious minorities, and now the relations are largely unproblematic. Most of the problems arose when immigration flows to Italy began to increase in the 70s'-80s'. Italian institutions and society, despite signs indicating the growth of the phenomenon were not adequately prepared to deal with and govern it.

In Italy immigration was mainly a spontaneous, unforeseen and largely unregulated change: it grew from the bottom of the labour market and in the local social contexts; afterwards, it became recognized by public institutions and was regulated juridically. The first immigration law was drawn up only in 1986, then came the Martelli law (1990), the Turco-Napolitano law (1998), and finally the Bossi-Fini law (2002) was passed. Apart from the laws, the approach of Italian institutions and society at the beginning was to consider immigration as a “pathological” phenomenon, a social emergency that had to be resolved quickly.

The economic role of immigrants was barely recognised. Afterwards, despite increased awareness of the importance of immigrants for many sectors of the labour market, a negative representation always prevailed. It was linked to concerns about public security, employment, access to the welfare state and the cultural identity of the nation. Some political forces have exploited these worries, using them as central themes of their electoral campaigns and political programmes.

Looking at the challenges that native, religious and immigrant minorities have posed, we could distinguish between the first two and the third one. As regards the first two groups, they posed linguistic (by native minorities) and cultural (by religious) challenges to the majority, but without



destabilizing the common representation of Italy as a relatively homogeneous ethnic, linguistic and religious population. These minorities were institutionally recognised and accepted. By contrast, in terms of immigrant groups, the difficulties in accepting them are linked to their cultural and religious diversity.

In contrast with the labour market, where immigrants are accepted and economically integrated – albeit in “subordinate integration”, cultural and religious integration is a theme that is rarely discussed and is never considered carefully. Indeed Italy is experiencing a profound contradiction: while society is becoming more and more multi-ethnic, in its cultural self-representation it tends to reject religious and cultural plurality.

The difficulty in accommodating and tolerating diversities is particularly evident in the case of Muslims, the Chinese and Roma. In the first part of the report (chapter 1) we show how these three groups are less tolerated than others. Generally speaking, we can say that Muslims are not well tolerated because of their religious diversity and their claims linked to religion (e.g. building Mosques or Arabic schools, wearing the veil). This minority is seen as a threat to the traditional notion of identity and citizenship, which are bound to the nation state, and its unity of language, religion, and culture. In addition to this, problems related to security increased because of the perceived link between Islam and terrorism.

The Chinese are often subjected to prejudice because they are seen as unfair competitors in the labour market. The hostility towards them translates into a policy of control and restrictive local ordinances whose aim is to damage their economic activities. Finally, the minority which is most subject to intolerance is the Roma, against which violent reactions broke out in local communities, including the burning of some Roma camps. Concerns are centred around public security and social order.

In order to look at the challenges that cultural and religious diversity of immigrants poses for the Italian state and society, we focused on the management of these diversities within two contexts: education and politics.

Regarding the education context, we identified two key events that have challenged school life, bringing to the fore the issue of the management of foreign students within Italian schools. The first issue is the proposal of the Northern League party in 2008 to create separate classes for immigrant students; the second issue is the building of their own schools, with their own language (Arabic) and different curricula, by some Muslims living in Milan. The former is related to the accommodation of diversities in school life, the latter to the structure of the Italian education system, which is based mostly on state schools whereas private schools are mostly Catholic.

As regards the political context, we chose a key event that affected the rights of immigrants, i.e. the “local policies of exclusion”, some measures introduced at local level to guarantee urban safety, regulate economic activities, and adjust welfare state provisions. Despite the declared aim of protecting general interests, they actually limited immigrants’ rights. The fact that there are institutional obstacles to the rights of minorities allows us to understand how the political arena deals with the cultural diversity associated with immigration.

Each case study was investigated through a range of materials: we used secondary sources (statistical data, policy documents, court judgments and newspaper articles) and we conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with social and policy actors involved in the selected key events. Specifically, we interviewed 21 actors in the key studies regarding school life and 15 actors in political life. In addition, we organized a discussion group with 9 people involved in immigrants’ issues to discuss the key events in school life.

All the data from the two phases of research were analysed in order to collect information about the frames and discourses used by social and policy actors to talk about the management of

cultural and religious diversities. The main strategy used to analyse data was the tradition of qualitative discourse analysis, from a critical perspective.

The core of the report shows the results of the analysis. In relation to school life (chapter 3), the data shows that the proposal of separate classes is considered completely wrong from a pedagogical and educational point of view by the interviewees (teachers and head-teachers). The apparently protective approach of the proposal (firstly towards foreign students, who could fill their Italian language gap through bridge-classes; secondly towards Italians, who could carry on with the learning programmes in mainstream classes without being slowed down by foreign students) actually results in separation and exclusion. Based on the shared beliefs among experts and education staff, the approach which has to be used within schools is that of interculturalism: it implies that people engage in dialogue, recognise and appreciate their diversities. It is different from tolerance, which is considered an inappropriate approach, because it highlights the existence of unequal treatment and distribution of power between those who tolerate and those who are tolerated.

Teachers believe firmly in the intercultural approach, and they try to apply it in everyday school life and in curricula, obtaining some good - albeit superficial - results (e.g. the introduction of references to the countries of origin of foreign students in the curricula, the celebration of their festivals, etc.). Nevertheless, there are two kinds of problem. Firstly, interculturalism is a vague concept, and teachers interpret it in various ways, according to their personal experiences and beliefs, the circumstances and situations and the school's attitude. Secondly, in some situations teachers have difficulty in adopting an intercultural approach, and they only tolerate diversity. Some foreign families' demands, for example, are hard to tolerate because in some interviewees' opinions they damage children's rights or well-being (e.g. fasting during Ramadan), or undermine the universalistic approach of the Italian school system (e.g. the demand to pray at specific times during the school day). In these cases, if teachers cannot mediate and find a compromise with families, they react with an attitude of minimal tolerance, grudgingly accepting foreign families' claims. By contrast, foreign families' cultural claims are acknowledged when they are consistent with human rights (e.g. the freedom of religion).

The case of the Muslim school is representative of how different social actors construct different frames to talk about religious and cultural diversities. The political majority at that time and several mass media, together with the prevailing public opinion, described the school as a Madrasah, stressing the religious character of it, so that they referred to the dangers of fundamentalism. By contrast, the Islamic community tried to deny that frame and to outline a different characteristic of the school, i.e. being an Arab school. It highlighted its practical purposes, not its religious significance and identity: the aim of the school was to teach Egyptian students so that they could go back home knowing Arabic and with a valid qualification. A third frame, shared by some civil society actors and politicians, was that the danger that the demand for recognition by the Islamic community would be damaging for children who attended the school. The lack of Italian language skills and isolation, without any relationships with the Italian education system was seen as damaging for the children, who were not prepared for entering Italian secondary schools if they did not go to Egypt. Since the civil society actors thought that the right to learn Arabic and to maintain the link with the culture of origin were legitimate, they supported the need to keep in touch with Italian society, albeit in a gradual way and while respecting Muslims' cultural needs. Beyond the different frames used by the various political and civil society actors, this case study highlights how the Italian education system is not yet ready to address the issue of private and faith schools. The hostility towards the school, the various negative reactions of politicians and civil society actors and finally the way in which the school was closed are representative of the institutions' inability to manage the possible future demands of some minorities. The general approach was based on intolerance or minimal tolerance towards what is perceived by the national culture as alien, dangerous and capable of creating segregation.

As regards political life (chapter 4), the data show that the "local policies of exclusion" are "institutionalized forms of intolerance": they are drawn up and enforced by legitimate bodies (i.e. the

Municipalities), which are elected democratically and which influence social life within the local communities. They are institutional obstacles to the rights of several minorities (civil, social) and to their freedom of expressing their cultural and religious identity. Nevertheless, they are justified by mayors using three types of frames, which ring true with the public and are successful in hiding the discriminatory intentions. The first is about urban safety and decency: some local policies are justified because they guarantee citizens' security and preserve urban decorum and social order, e.g. the controls on places of worship or checks on the conditions of houses in the city centres. The second frame is the scarcity of economic and social resources: the local policies are necessary because the social benefits have been reduced, so they have to be set aside only for Italians or for those who have been residents in the town for a long period (e.g. bonus for babies reserved only for babies born to Italian parents). Only Italian citizens have the right to access some social and economic benefits, whereas immigrants have to be excluded because they are "guests". Finally, the third frame is about the defence of Italian identity, culture and traditions. The prohibition on opening mosques, new kebab shops or to ban non traditional activities in the city centres is a case in point. Here the local policies are justified because they defend the Italian (and local) culture from immigrants, who are perceived as invaders. They are seen as necessary to avoid contamination and transformation of Italian cities, culture and habits.

By contrast, the main frame used by civil society actors to fight against these policies is that of discrimination. These measures are in fact discriminatory. They damage fundamental human rights, such as the freedom of religion, personal freedom, and equality among people. Human rights must be guaranteed, and are not open to debate or subject to political discretion. This is also the frame used in courts, and it has often been cited in judgments condemning the local policies.

The research findings show that the accommodation of cultural and religious diversity is problematic in the case of immigrants. Whereas native linguistic and religious minorities are quietly accepted and their rights are guaranteed by law, immigrants are accepted only as "silent workers" in the labour market. By contrast, they attract attention and concern when they become visible and demand rights or public and institutional recognition. The political climax contributes to the spread of anti-immigrant and intolerant discourses.

Nevertheless, in some contexts intolerance does not prevail but rather other attitudes and discourses emerge. The school context is an example of this: the education staff shares the principle of interculturalism and, even when it has difficulty in enforcing it, it adopts attitudes and behaviours of intercultural acceptance, replying with minimal toleration only in the case of claims perceived as dangerous for the minors' well-being.

Intolerance is also opposed by civil society actors. There are NGOs, charities and organizations linked to the Catholic church, voluntary organizations which firmly believe in the fight against intolerance and against those who promote intolerance initiatives. These actors fight against the "local policies of exclusion" and point out that the accommodation of diversities does not occur through tolerance but firstly through the respect of human rights. The policies of exclusion are a battlefield in which different views of Italian society and its future come into conflict. The willingness to preserve the social order, through the denial of the transformation of Italy in a multicultural society, should tackle the recognition of the changes which have occurred and with a culture of respect for human rights. Despite the resistance and opposition, this culture appears the strongest and shows that the issue of respect for cultural and religious diversity remains open to and inclined towards advancement.

## **Keywords**

Italy, immigration, diversity, minorities, education, interculturalism, immigration policies, local policies of exclusion, civil society

## **1. Introduction**

The issue of the management of cultural diversity in Italy is intertwined with its recent history. Italy is a relatively young state, made up of territories which had been politically separated for centuries, and it still has profound internal economic inequalities. Nevertheless, it has been always conceived and represented as a unitary and homogeneous nation. Firstly there was the Kingdom of Italy born after the national Risorgimento, then the fascist regime tried to wipe out internal diversities, imposing a single culture and a 'national' language in a historically fragmented country. It was only with the establishment of a democratic system after the Second World War that the recognition of minorities began to attract attention. But, this process of recognition had to wait several years before being accepted through legislation.

While the management of linguistic and religious minorities has never been very important in the public debate, the issue of diversity has forcefully emerged with the arrival and settlement of immigrants from abroad. In its recent history, in fact, Italy had only experienced the phenomenon of mass emigration and of internal migration, from the poorer regions to the more industrialized ones.

This report therefore focuses on the relationship with cultural and religious diversity represented by immigration, which in just over twenty years has had a very significant impact on the labor market, urban spaces and social life. It aims to analyze how public institutions and Italian society have responded to the rapid and unexpected growth of a diversity which is perceived as problematic, uncontrolled, threatening and destabilizing by most Italians.

The report is divided into three parts. In the first part the historical and political context regarding the management of linguistic and religious diversity in Italy is described, focusing on the controversial relationship with foreign immigration and examining the three minorities that seem mostly affected by prejudice: Muslims, the Chinese, Roma and Sinti.

In the second part the management of diversity within the school system is considered. The issue of intercultural education as a solution to the problem of the reception and the education of pupils from immigrant families is critically analyzed. Two exemplary case-studies are analysed in depth: the proposal to set up bridge-classes for children of foreign origin and the issue of the Egyptian-Arab school in Milan.

Finally, in the third part of the report the challenge of diversity within the political system is considered. The difficulties involved in obtaining Italian citizenship, the weakness of the political participation of immigrants and the advocacy of various organizations in Italian civil society are mentioned.

A topic that has acquired great importance in the Italian public debate in recent years is discussed: the local policies of exclusion of immigrants. Reasons, discursive frames and the developments of this issue are analyzed. Particular attention is then given to the reactions of civil society actors who have taken a stand against the policies of exclusion: the political weakness of immigrants and of their associations tends to be balanced by Italian organizations that defend their interests.

As in the case of the education system, tolerance is rarely mentioned as the value on which openness to cultural diversity is built. The frame of respect for civil liberties and human rights is generally the discursive repertoire to which the social actors involved refer.

Italy is experiencing a transition to a difficult acceptance of its new status, i.e. a country that receives unprecedented cultural and religious diversity. The report aims to offer an interpretation of the problematic issues about this, the developments and the opposition to this path.

## **2. Tolerance and cultural diversity discourses and practices**

This chapter deals with the question of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in Italy. Firstly, it discusses the main historical events which led to the formation of Italy as a democratic republic and a modern state. Italy took several decades to build up a united nation because of its previous political fragmentation. After a long process of unification, today the widely accepted representation is that of a relatively homogeneous ethnic, linguistic and religious population, despite deep regional socio-economic diversities, especially between the North and the South of Italy.

In its second part, the chapter reviews the main cultural diversity challenges in Italy in the last 30 years, paying attention to the relationships between the State and minority groups. We are specifically referring to three types of minorities: linguistic, religious and immigrant. If we look at the challenges that these three minority groups pose, we could distinguish between the first two and the third one. As regards the first two groups, they have posed linguistic (from native minorities) and cultural (from religious minorities) challenges to the majority, but without destabilizing the common representation of Italy as a relatively homogeneous ethnic, linguistic and religious population. These small minorities are gradually being integrated into Italian society, by means which include institutional recognition.

By contrast, in terms of the immigrant groups, the difficulties in accepting them are linked to the rapid increase in their size and to the social and institutional lack of preparation to the shift towards being a receiving country, but also to their perceived cultural and religious diversity. Migrants are in fact accepted as silent workers, with a specific and well defined position in the labour market, where they are perceived as useful but they must not demand rights or social benefits (Ambrosini 2011). By contrast, if they become a visible community and demand public and institutional recognition, the opposition to them increases.

At the core of these issues there are some minority groups that are tolerated less easily than others, for different reasons, but all linked to their diversity, e.g. the Muslims, the Chinese and the Roma. After discussing the migration history of these three immigrant groups, the chapter deals with the aspects of their differences that are contested and considered difficult to accommodate and tolerate in Italian society.

The chapter ends with some considerations about the current political climate and the increasing attitudes of intolerance that have emerged in the last few years in Italy.

### **2.2. Italy from an emigration country to an immigration country**

Along with a number of other countries, particularly those in southern Europe, Italy has only been a receiving country for international immigration for about 25 years. Italy itself has a long tradition of emigration and it is estimated that there are currently about 60 million emigrants of Italian origin all over the world.

In Italian Law, the concept of “immigrant” first appeared as recently as 1986. Previously there was only the general juridical type of the “foreigner”, whose residence within the national boundaries was governed by public security law.

In the Italian public discourse, up to the end of the 1980s, "immigrants" were internal migrants from less developed southern regions ("*Mezzogiorno*") who moved towards the more dynamic areas of Northern Italy, a huge phenomenon throughout the twentieth century, and particularly intense in the "golden period" of the industrial development (from the 1950s and the first half of the 1970s): initially migration was mainly towards the so called "industrial triangle" (Milan-Turin-Genoa), afterwards it was also towards the central and north-eastern regions, characterized by the growth of small firms and industrial districts. Based on a historical analysis, we know that today's aversions and oppositions towards foreign immigrants were directed to migrants from the south of Italy in the past. However, in those times immigration was not a central issue in the political debate, essentially because the internal migrants were citizens and voters and they might be employed as civil servants.

The phenomenon of international migration has therefore developed in a national context characterized by certain aspects that should be taken into account throughout the analysis:

- The achievement of national unity is relatively recent: 2011 marked the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the nation's birth, after many centuries of political fragmentation;
- A national context characterized by deep socio-economic unbalances, since Italy is the country with the greatest territorial differences in Europe, in terms of rates of unemployment and indicators of economic development;
- A shared and lasting self-representation as a country historically burdened by huge problems of poverty and unemployment, without enough resources or jobs to be shared to people arriving from foreign countries;
- An institutional weakness of public authorities and a difficult relationship between the citizens and the State, a phenomenon that has become even more serious since the crisis of the so-called "First Republic", at the beginning of the 1990s;
- The vitality of civil society (trade unions, associations, the Catholic church...) and the high number of SMEs making up the economy (about 4.5 million companies registered).

In this context, the surprising issue is how rapidly Italy went from being an emigration country to that of an immigration country (Pugliese, 2002). Presently around 5 million legal immigrants are living in Italy. It was mainly a spontaneous change, unforeseen and largely unregulated: it grew from the bottom of the labour market and in the local social contexts; afterwards, it became recognized by public institutions and regulated juridically, with all kinds of delays and oppositions (Calavita, 2005).

Public awareness of the transformation of Italy as an immigration country rose at the beginning of the 1990s, but the phenomenon was essentially considered "pathological": a new social problem in a country already full of difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, silently and in an almost invisible and fragmentary way, the labour market (companies, but also households) as well as the civil society actors, were going in the opposite direction, promoting the economic integration of the foreign immigrants; at the beginning the process was mainly informal, afterwards it became increasingly formalized in the richest and more developed regions, where the gap between job supply and job demand was becoming deeper and more evident.

The political regulation of this situation only arrived later; the discrepancy between the market and migration policy continued to grow as time went on. Not surprisingly the most important instrument for the migration policy consisted of several regularization acts (Barbagli, Colombo and Sciortino, 2004): the last one was introduced during the summer of 2009, making a total of six

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<sup>1</sup> Just to give an example, we can cite the first experiences of vocational education for immigrants, inspired by the same vision: large amounts of public money were spent on organizing courses of vocational education, in order to promote the return of immigrants to their own country. The migration was seen as a social "illness" to be treated, the return as the "recovery", education as the "therapy".

regularizations in a little over twenty years, as well as some other non-declared regularizations, introduced through the so-called “flows decree”. Regarding this issue, it is clear that there has been considerable continuity in Italian migration policies, despite the left-right political power swings.

But it should also be stressed that Italy is more likely to receive working migrants in comparison with most of the EU countries, because of its yearly based system of admission “quotas” of foreign workers, which is not limited to seasonal or the highly qualified workers. But every year the manpower demand in the labour market (companies and households) exceeds the conservative forecasts for foreign workers employment made by the government, and it forces policy-makers to subsequently realign the rules to the real market requests and dynamics. In the Lombardy region, according to the data (Blangiardo 2005) two regular immigrants out of three have been irregular for a certain period during their stay in Italy. The percentage is even higher among workers, since the immigrants that have always been regular are often those who have arrived to reunite with their families.

In contrast with the labour market, where immigrants are accepted and economically integrated – albeit in a “subordinate integration” (Ambrosini 2010) – the cultural and religious integration is a theme that is rarely discussed and is never considered carefully. Indeed Italy is experiencing a profound contradiction: while society is becoming more and more multi-ethnic<sup>2</sup>, in its cultural self-representation it tends to reject religious and cultural plurality.

### 2.3. National identity and State formation

The birth of the Italian nation state was a turbulent and long process that goes back to the 1800s. In this section we will try to summarize the main historical events which led to the formation of Italy as a democratic republic.

The birth of the Kingdom of Italy took place in 1861, when the national parliament was convened in Turin, after the 1859-1860 wars, supported initially by Napoleon III’s France. In this way the previous political order was abandoned, which was based on two aspects: firstly, the direct or indirect domination by the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, from which the Lombardy region was removed in 1859 and Veneto in 1866; secondly, a series of small States that used to be independent, the most important of which was the Kingdom of Two Sicilies (*Regno delle due Sicilie*) in Southern Italy. The Italian ruling monarchy was the Savoias, sovereigns of Piedmont and Sardinia, who were managing the unification process of the so-called Italian Risorgimento, under the guidance of Prime Minister Camillo Benso, count of Cavour, who finally achieved much longed-for expansionism in the peninsula.

The new State tried to create a modern institutional structure that was centralized and was fundamentally inspired by the French model. Although formally the new subjects had spontaneously adhered to the unified state, through electoral procedures (the so-called “plebiscites”), in many ways the process was an annexation that was carried out by the Piedmont State, that kept on deciding and controlling most of the political, administrative and military duties: king Vittorio Emanuele II, for example, did not want to change the name, symbolically pointing out a dynastic continuity and not a new beginning. The centralized monarchic structure that had few democratic characteristics (the right to vote was limited to a minority of well-off male citizens) disappointed all those who hoped for the construction of a different national entity, that was more federalist, democratic, and ready to take into

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<sup>2</sup> Some indicators of this are: the amount of immigrant residents on the entire population, the rates of employment, the passage from employed jobs to autonomous ones, the increasing number of pupils of foreign origins in the schools.



consideration the needs of the popular classes; the disappointment was even bigger for those, like the followers of Giuseppe Mazzini, who professed republican ideals. Moreover the new state was born with several elements of weakness:

- The unification movement had been supported by the bourgeois and the intellectual elite, with the substantial indifference, and sometimes explicit hostility, of the popular classes: in Southern Italy (*Mezzogiorno*) the discontent about the taxes and the constraints imposed by the new legislators, as well as the worsening of the economic conditions, brought about the phenomenon of the “brigandage”, repressed harshly by the army with a conflict we can consider to be almost a civil war.
- According to estimates, the Italian language was fluently spoken by only a small fraction of people, about 3% of the population, while 78% was illiterate. The Count of Cavour had to learn Italian to be able to make his speech during the installation of the Parliament. In the court the *Piedmontese* dialect was normally spoken or, in the most formal occasions, French. All the history books mention the famous sentence attributed to Massimo d'Azeglio, another leader of the *Risorgimento*: “Once Italy is made, we have to make Italians”.
- The new state was born in contrast with the Catholic Church, it took away temporal power from a part of Central Italy, it adopted an anticlerical and Masonic ideological approach. The clash worsened in 1870, with the occupation of Rome, that became the new capital city, and with the laws of expropriation of many ecclesiastical properties, sold by auction to benefit the emerging bourgeoisie. Pio IX the pope withdrew to the Vatican, because of excommunication he clashed with the new governing authorities and those who had obtained ecclesiastical properties and, with the “*Non expedit*” act which forbade the granting of public positions to observant Catholics in the new state. This fact produced a deep fracture in the collective conscience and deprived the Italian state of the support of the popular masses, who were tied up to Catholicism.

The economic policy of the united Italy favoured the industries of Northern Italy, which were more advanced and better connected with the rest of Europe, while it was penalizing for the weaker economic infrastructure of Southern Italy. Rather than decreasing, the gap grew wider over the following decades, and among its consequences was emigration of great proportions, especially towards America, starting from about 1880 and reaching a peak in the first few years of the new century. Other migratory movements, on a smaller scale and with predominantly seasonal trends, were directed towards the more advanced European countries: France, Germany and Switzerland. Starting from the 1880s until about 1910, the phenomenon involved a total of 13.5 million Italians. In those times Italy was the European country that was most marked by emigration, that caused a massive decrease in the working population in many villages, especially in the south of the country. Italy became the nation of emigrants by definition.

In the same period, there was the modest and delayed colonial expansion in Africa, with the conquest of Eritrea and Somalia, the failing attempt of invasion in Ethiopia and the subsequent occupation of Libya (1912): the idea was that the “fourth bank” of Italy would have had to absorb the growing population and to represent an alternative to emigration to foreign countries, but it is a fact that it was an unsuccessful operation. Together with “orientalism” that favoured a vision of the African people – the “other” – as distant and inferior, the process also contributed to creating the myth of the “Italians-are-good-people”, benevolent and generous colonizers: a myth that only in the last few years has been debated in the public sphere, and not only among social and historical researchers.

Participation to the First World War was officially justified with the wish to complete the process of *Risorgimento*, “freeing” the “unredeemed” cities of Trento and Trieste, at the north-east boundaries from Austrian Hungarian domination. The majority of the population did not agree with the war, which was supported by part of the political elite in order to strengthen the national identity through the war effort and the sacrifice of lives, and it was promoted by the military apparatus and

suppliers to the armed forces. It is a fact that victory had a very high price in terms of fallen soldiers, wounded and mutilated, and the balance was even worse considering the epidemic that followed, of the so-called “Spanish flu”.

The veterans’ frustration and the myth of the “mutilated victory” (territorial expansion was lower than people had been led to expect by the war propaganda and the allies’ promises), together with the impoverishment of the country, the post-war social conflicts, the growth of the socialist movement and the weakness of the governments, produced the favourable conditions for the advent of the fascist regime in 1922. The fragile democratic institutions of the country were suppressed, and the regime developed - like many other totalitarian regimes - a nationalistic representation, based on the legend of imperial Rome, which it tried to re-create through the colonial adventure in Ethiopia (1936), condemned by the international community, and the reinstatement of the empire. The regions conquered during the First World War (for example the Südtirol, Istria and Dalmazia, on the Eastern border) were submitted to a process of forced “Italianization”, with the prohibition to use other languages, the imposition of the Italian language in schools and in the public institutions, the installation of officials and soldiers from other regions, the translation into Italian of the names of cities and villages.

The government of Mussolini solved the so called “Rome issue”, with the stipulation of the Lateran Treaty (*Patti lateranensi*) with the Catholic Church in 1929, recognizing Catholicism as the official religion of the State and obtaining consent for the regime from a big part of the ecclesiastical hierarchies, of the clergy and of the believers.

The alliance with Hitler's Germany led to the adoption of the racial laws in 1938 and to the expulsion of the Jews from public life, from universities and from the professional activities: this was a shameful event that was removed for a long time from the nation’s history and which has only recently reached public awareness. What has generally been stressed in the public debate is the solidarity of many Italians with the Jews: only one out of four was captured and deported. Equally, in the national conscience the Italian occupation of foreign countries such as Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, has been represented for a long time as a reluctant and non-cruel participation in the war<sup>3</sup>:

After the catastrophic Second World War, Italy became a republic (1946) and a new Constitution was drawn up (1948). Fascism was execrated and removed by a public representation that exalted Resistance to the Nazi-fascist regime in the last phase of the war (1943-1945) and represented Italians as victims of a foreign occupation. This attitude produced “democratic antibodies” and a lasting allergy toward nationalistic myths, militarism, authoritarian governments. But it has also prevented the recognition of Italy’s responsibilities for the colonial atrocities, for the persecution of the Jews, for the mass support of the fascist regime during the 1930s, for the violence against civil and resistant populations in the occupied territories. Finally, rejecting fascism, Italians did not face the process of collective memory “purification” as the Germans did in the post-war period. For this reason today it is possible to find that inscription plates of the regime on public buildings are restored, relics of that period are sold in over-the-counter markets or – even worse – are reproduced, fighters from both sides (antifascist partisans and soldiers of the Salò Republic, supported by the Nazi army) may be considered to be on the same level, and in general the memory of fascism may be reconsidered a legitimate component of the nation’s history.

After the Second World War migration started again: almost a million Italians emigrated to foreign countries between 1946 and 1951 (Pugliese, 2002) but also many Italians moved from the rural areas to the cities, from the Veneto region to the so-called industrial triangle (Turin, Milan, Genoa), from the south (*Mezzogiorno*) to the north of Italy.

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<sup>3</sup> An example might be the novel “*L’armata Sagapò*”, upon which the successful movie “*Mediterraneo*”, directed by Gabriele Salvatores was based.

The ratio between exit and entry flows reversed in the 1970s, when arrivals from foreign countries started to exceed the departures. In the same decade, internal migrations started to decline, and they also changed in a qualitative sense i.e. fewer manual workers and more educated personnel. Between the two phenomena there was a relationship: the employers started to look for foreign immigrants, no longer being able to find the manpower they required in the south. Foreign migrants started to arrive after the border closure in the countries of Central and Northern Europe, thanks to the relative ease of entry into Italy, but they stayed because they found job opportunities, initially especially in the informal economy, in the domestic sector, in Mediterranean agriculture, and afterwards increasingly in the official economy. The turning point was the legislative reform at the end of 1989 (the “Martelli” law, named after the Minister of Justice), that allowed the employment of immigrant workers, regular residents, with the same procedures and conditions as Italian workers. Nevertheless, the political acceptance of the change in the country’s multi-ethnic direction was problematic. The Martelli law had been approved by a high parliamentary majority, with the only exception being the extreme right-wing party Italian Social Movement–National Right (MSI-DN) and of the small Republican Party looking for visibility; but in the 1990s a new subject appeared on the political scene, i.e. the Northern League. Among the themes proposed in the political agenda by this new formation was the opposition to Rome centralism, the opposition to a transfer of resources to the southern regions, the promotion of a strong federalism (or even secessionism), finally the hostility towards immigrants and Roma minorities, that assumed a greater importance in its political agenda and obtained a considerable success.

The events of 1989, with the end of communism, and the explosion of the scandals due to political corruption, caused the end of the so-called First Republic. The Northern League benefited greatly from the moral revolt of the citizens, and obtained the government of a great city, Milan. The political system was changed according to a majority system criterion and in 1994 Silvio Berlusconi started his political career, creating a coalition that included MSI-DN (which changed its name to “Alleanza Nazionale”), the Northern League and the newborn party named “Forza Italia” which governed for two years.

The centre-left coalition, governing from 1996 to 2001, succeeded in approving an important bill on immigration in 1998 (law Turco-Napolitano), but refused to face the issue of citizenship acquisition and the right to vote in local administrative elections. This dissonance, between an almost reluctant openness to economic immigration, together with some acquisitions in the field of civil rights, and a substantial difficulty in recognizing its political implications, is a constant feature of the Italian situation.

## **2.4. Cultural diversity challenges during the last 30 years**

In 1946 Italy was transformed into a democratic republic by its electorate (through a referendum) and a Constituent Assembly was created to draw up the Constitution. In its work the Constituent Assembly formulated several principles that established citizens’ equality and protected minority rights. The Constitution articles were approved on December 22nd 1947 and became effective from January 1st 1948. Among them we would cite:

- Article 2: “The Republic recognizes and guarantees inviolable human rights”.
- Article 3: “All citizens have equal social status and are equal before the law, without regard to their sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, and personal or social conditions”.

By the beginning of the new Italian republic it was recognised that all the citizens are equal and every difference has to be respected. Therefore, the Legislator took into account the necessity to guarantee equality and the rights of minorities.

We will summarise below the most important challenges in cultural diversity that the Italian State had to face, in terms of the requests of native minorities, the needs of religious minorities and, in recent years, the increase of a foreign population.

#### **2.4.1. The native minorities**

In the Italian context, when we speak of native minorities, we are referring to national and territorially concentrated minorities. After the Second World War, relations with the European neighbour states were sometimes difficult, because of their hopes to annex border territories into their sovereignty. France would have liked to annex Valle d'Aosta, while Austria wanted to recover the German mother-tongue areas of *Sud Tirolo-Alto Adige*. On the east boundaries, Tito's Yugoslavia had annexed Istria and Dalmazia and wanted Trieste.

The Italian government led by Alcide De Gasperi limited the secessionist tendencies and created the "special statute" for some regions. In this way the border regions acquired great autonomy and privileged economic treatment, and the issue was resolved in a politically acceptable way on the international scene. *Alto Adige*, however, remained politically unstable, and it was only in the 1960s, following a period of bloody terrorist attacks, that an institutional solution was reached, with the agreement of Austria, with the creation of two autonomous provinces, Trento and Bolzano, the second of which had a prevalence of German mother-tongue speakers.

Generally, territorial minorities have always been protected by the Italian Constitution, which declares in article 6: "The Republic protects the linguistic minorities through special rules". Except for the regions with a special statute, which protect their minorities through their statute (for example the language minority group that speaks French in Valle D'Aosta is protected by article 38 of its Regional Statute), article 6 had never been applied in practice. Therefore, some linguistic minorities scattered across the Italian territory were not recognised and preserved *de facto* (for example the Slovenian minority in the eastern regions). It was only in the 1980s that some Italian parliamentarians began to formulate a law to implement article 6. After many years of parliamentary debate, law 482/99 was approved.

The law, "Rules on the protection of historical linguistic minorities", recognises 12 languages: Friulian, Ladino, German, Slovenian, Occitan, French, Franco, Albanian, Greek, Sardinian, Catalan and Croatian. These languages can be taught in schools, used in public offices and by the media.

It is interesting to note that law 482/99 did not include the Roma language among the minority languages to be protected. The law was created to be applied to linguistic minorities who were settled in well-defined territories and it did not provide protection to minorities who did not have their own territory, such as the Roma and Sinti (Bonetti, 2010b).

To redress the legislative imbalance, some regions (11 in total) implemented special rules to address the "Roma questions", but they concerned principally the management of camps and various cultural initiatives to support Roma. Besides, they were not at all implemented, due to a lack of financial resources.

#### **2.4.2. The religious minorities**

Besides the native minorities, the Constituent Assembly had to define and regularize institutionally the relations with the Catholic Church and with the other religions. With regard to the former, after a relentless debate, article 7 recognized the validity of the Lateran Treaty, which was modified only in 1984. The Communist Party also voted in favour, after a famous speech by its leader Palmiro Togliatti. Italy chose to favour the relationship with the Catholic church but also to respect other religious denominations. The minorities are therefore protected with article 8, according to which “Religious denominations are equally free in the eyes of the law. Denominations other than Catholicism have the right to organize themselves according to their own rules, provided they do not conflict with the Italian legal system. Their relationship with the state is regulated by law, based on agreements with their representatives” (article 8, Italian Constitution). Moreover article 19 establishes the right to freedom of religion, without any doubt: “Everyone is entitled to freely profess religious beliefs in any form, individually or with others, to promote them, and to celebrate rites in public or in private, provided they are not offensive to public morality”(article 19, Italian Constitution).

Despite the articles about the right to freedom of religion contained in the Italian Constitution, a policy on the different religions was drawn up only in the 1980s, after the revision of the Lateran Treaty (1929). The revision was made after a long and difficult debate between the Italian government and the Catholic Church. The most important change was the removal of Catholicism as the religion of the state. Another important change was the removal of the Catholic religion as a compulsory school subject.

After the revision, Italian governments began to sign various agreements with other religions, the first of which were the agreements with the Waldesian and the Methodist Churches (1984). Generally, the governments in the years that followed tried to apply the Constitution’s articles about the freedom of religion, they created technical bodies ad hoc to guarantee this freedom and to sign the agreements.

After the agreement with the Waldesian and the Methodist Churches, the next ones were signed with the Adventist Churches and Assemblies of God (1986), then with the Jewish Council (1987).

The greatest difficulties were to sign the agreements with those religions that had specific consequences in civic life and its organization. For example the Jewish religion grants its followers the right not to work or do any activities on Saturday. This rule collides with the habit of Italian schools (specifically the secondary schools), that have lessons on Saturdays. The problem was resolved with the agreement that gave people the right to be absent from work and school on Saturdays for religious reasons.

Other difficulties arose when the agreements were signed with the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Buddhists (2000), who were already recognised as legal entities (the first in 1991, the second in 1987) and had already asked for the agreement. As regards the first, the main problem was to reconcile the particular position of this religion in the state and the consequences of the religion’s obligations in civic life.

Concerning Buddhism, the Italian government did not know how to draw up the agreement with this religion, which differs fundamentally from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The enforcement of article 8 of the Constitution in relation to Buddhism was difficult because the agreements were generally designed for a typically Western cultural context, and not for a spiritual phenomenon which is very different from the Western concept of religion.

Besides, both religions pay particular attention to religious education within schools. In the agreements it is recognised that it is up to the religious organizations and families to teach religion to pupils. In the agreement with the Buddhists, article 6 also states that the Buddhist organizations could

build their schools, these schools have to be recognised institutionally, and their students have to be treated the same as the students in Italian state schools.

A second important aspect regards the religious holy days. Both the agreements, as with the Jewish one, recognised the right to celebrate holy days. Specifically, in the agreement with the Jehovah's Witnesses, absence from work is permitted (even though workers must at some point make up for the lost working hours) and also absence from school is justified. As regards the Buddhists, only the right to observe the holy days is allowed if it is "exercised within the framework of the flexibility of work." The most recent agreements were signed in 2007 with the Apostolic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Orthodox Exarchate for Southern Europe and the Italian Hindu Union.

Nevertheless, the procedures to sign the agreements are very complex and long, and concrete enforcement does not occur. It could be said that there are two kinds of problems regarding the relations with other religions. Firstly, Italian society has historically been shaped by Catholicism, and so awareness of religious differences has remained low; consequently, non-Catholic religious organizations have difficulty obtaining recognition by institutions and society. Secondly, it is always questionable where the balance lies between the recognition of differences and guaranteeing equality of treatment.

In addition, in the last few years the issue of Islam has arisen in Italy because of the increase in Muslim migrants and because of their demands to be recognised, to practice their religion freely and to build their places of worship. However, an agreement with Italian Muslims has not yet been signed. The general explanation used to justify the lack of agreement with the Muslims is that in Italy there is not an official body which is representative of all the Italian Muslim communities<sup>4</sup>.

### **2.4.3 Immigrants**

The most recent issue regarding cultural diversity in the Italian context is the increase in the number of immigrants. As we saw above, Italy went from being an emigration to an immigration country rapidly, and consequently it was not ready to manage the arrival and settlement of foreign people. If we look into the Italian Constitution, there is no reference to immigrants and immigration. When the Constitution was drawn up, the concern of the Constituent Assembly was to protect the Italians who had emigrated to foreign countries<sup>5</sup>. Only one issue regarding migrants was mentioned in the Constitution, namely the right of asylum (article 10): it recognized refugees coming from eastern European countries, through the additional clause named "geographical reserve", although a subsequent law meant that it was subject to operational restrictions. The first emergency of this kind that the new state had to face was receiving around 400-500,000 refugees from Istria and Dalmazia.

The first law about immigration was drawn up in 1986, and contained "rules regarding employment and treatment of extra-communitarian workers and rules against illegal immigration". The law's aim was to guarantee immigrant workers the same rights as Italian workers, and to control the entry of new migrants. After that, three other laws were drawn up over the next few years: the Martelli law in 1990, the Turco-Napolitano law in 1998 and finally the Bossi-Fini law in 2002. Apart from some progress in the 1998 law which provided some measures to promote immigrant integration,

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<sup>4</sup> In our opinion this is not an actual explanation and the French case provides evidence for this: in France Muslim communities can interact with the state due to the creation of the Council of Muslim worship, a representative body which is recognised institutionally.

<sup>5</sup> Two decades after the Constitution was approved the newborn republic tried to improve their judicial treatment through bilateral agreements and appropriate action through the international institutions.

the attitude of Italian institutions and of society towards immigration was characterised by a humanitarian approach on the part of some (i.e. charity organizations, trade unions) and by a defensive or restrictive approach by others (i.e. the League North party). As stated previously, immigration was considered a “pathological” phenomenon, an emergency that had to be resolved quickly. The common political solutions adopted by the Italian governments were the regularization acts, aimed at regularizing people already living on the territory<sup>6</sup>.

**Tab. 1 Migrant population resident in Italy - country of origin - 16 biggest nationalities**

Country of origin	Absolute numbers	% of the total resident immigrants	% of Italian population
Romania	968576	21.02	1,61%
Albania	482627	10.06	0,80%
Morocco	452424	9.09	0,75%
China	209934	4.06	0,35%
Ukraine	200730	4.04	0,33%
Philippines	134154	2.09	0,22%
Moldova	130948	2.09	0,22%
India	121036	2.06	0,20%
Poland	109018	2.04	0,18%
Tunisia	106291	2.03	0,18%
Peru	98603	2.02	0,16%
Ecuador	91625	2.00	0,15%
Egypt	90365	2.00	0,15%
Macedonia	89900	2.00	0,15%
Bangladesh	82451	1.08	0,14%
Sri Lanka	81094	1.08	0,13%
<b>Total 16 countries</b>	<b>3.449.776</b>	<b>75,48%</b>	<b>5,72%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4.570.317</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>7,57%</b>

**Dossier statistico Caritas Migrantes/ Istat Data - 1st January 2010**

\*These data count all the legal immigrants, not only the resident ones.

<sup>6</sup> The last regularization act was enacted in September 2009, and it was implemented to regularize immigrant domestic workers.

If we look at resident immigrants, we see that there are 4.570.317 (Caritas Migrantes 2011), i.e. 7.5% of the total Italian population (tab.1). Nevertheless, concerns about foreigners, the campaigns to criminalize them and racist behaviours of some political parties are currently common. Over half of all migrants are women (51.8%). The five main groups are the Rumanians, the Albanians, the Moroccans, the Chinese and the Ukrainians.

**Tab. 2 Migrant population resident In Italy and Italian population for religion\*\***

	<b>Absolute numbers</b>	<b>% of the total resident immigrants</b>	<b>Absolute numbers</b>	<b>% of Italian population</b>
<b>Christians</b>	<b>2.109.481</b>	<b>49,81%</b>	<b>59.353.790</b>	<b>99,55%</b>
Orthodox	1.221.915	28,85%	57.500	0,10%
Catholics	700.777	16,55%	58.461.290	98,06%
Protestants	137.430	3,25%	409.000	0,69%
Other Christians	49.532	1,17%	426.000	0,71%
<b>Muslims</b>	<b>1.354.901</b>	<b>31,99%</b>	<b>43.000</b>	<b>0,07%</b>
Jews	6.809	0,16%	29.000	0,05%
Hindu	111.871	2,64%	18.000	0,03%
Buddhists	120.062	2,83%	107.000	0,18%
Others	48.535	1,15%	68.500	0,11%
Nonbelievers/non registered	483.400	11,41%	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4.235.059</b>	<b>4.235.059</b>	<b>59.619.290</b>	<b>59.619.290</b>

\*\*Data regarding migrant resident population come from Dossier statistico Caritas Migrantes/Minister of Interior data (31 December 2009). Data regarding Italians come from Centre of Studies on New Religions (31 December 2008).

**Table 3: Main Minority Groups in Italy and their Dimensions of Difference**

<b>Dimensions of difference</b>	<b>Citizenship</b>	<b>Racial</b>	<b>Ethnic</b>	<b>Religious</b>	<b>Cultural</b>	<b>Linguistic</b>
<b>Minority groups</b>						
Muslims	X		X	X	X	
Chinese	X	X	X		X	X
Roma	X		X		X	



In this section we shall outline not the main immigrant minority groups in size, but those who are at the core of the public and political debate. We refer to Muslims, the Roma and the Chinese. We shall discuss their migration history in Italy, their relation with the institutions and with the Italian population<sup>7</sup>. Secondly, we shall try to identify the aspects of their 'difference' that are contested and considered difficult to accommodate and tolerate in Italian society.

#### *2.4.4. Muslims*

The presence of Muslims in Italy became relevant in the 1980s-1990s, when a flux of migrants from North Africa started to emigrate and arrived in Italy. By that time they began to attract the attention of the institutions and society, which considered them as representatives of the diversity that was most difficult to deal with and to assimilate.

Muslims probably represent about one third of all immigrants with a resident permit<sup>8</sup>. In recent years they have become more visible because of the stabilization of families and the increase in the number of younger generations (but also because of the concerns arising after 11th September 2001). In the last few years Muslims have begun to make various demands regarding aspects of their everyday life, such as being allowed to build Mosques or to obtain recognition for their places of worship, the teaching of the Muslim religion and Arabic in schools, the recognition of prayer during working hours, the recognition of festivities. Even though the Islamic organizations are weak and not completely representative of Muslims, some of them have begun campaigns to get some degree of public recognition and sometimes they were invited to collaborate with the government to promote dialogue between Muslim communities and the State. Among these organizations we could mention the UCOII (Union of Islamic Organizations and Communities in Italy), COREIS (Islamic Religious Community), the Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy, ADAMI (Association of Muslim Women in Italy) and GMI (Young Muslim in Italy). All these organizations reflect the plurality and the complexity of Islam, and in particular of Italian Islam. As a consequence, it becomes difficult to manage the various relationships and reach an agreement with such a fragmented and heterogeneous subject. At the same time the Italian State avoids addressing the demands of Muslims, sustaining that there is not a Muslim organization that is able to represent the entire world of Italian Islam<sup>9</sup>.

In order to enhance dialogue between the Muslim communities and the State, in 2005 the centre-right government created the Assembly for Italian Islam. It is an institutional body which should collaborate with the Interior Ministry to encourage dialogue with the Islamic communities and to promote good relations among different cultural and religious groups. It consists of 16 members who are appointed by the Interior Ministry and chosen among the most important representatives of the Italian Islam.

Although the initial aim of the Assembly was to elaborate strategies of inclusion and to form an Italian Islam which could be compatible with Italian society, de facto it concentrated only on matters of principle such as terrorism, religious freedom, and the condition of women. Internal discussions and contentions arose among the representatives of the different organizations, and it

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<sup>7</sup> The groups which are the focus of public and political debate change over the time. In the 1990s the most stigmatized group was the Albanians, which were considered criminal and violent people. Over time the hostility towards them decreased, they entered the labour market and some became entrepreneurs, especially in construction. Today they are not the subject of prejudice that they were in the past.

<sup>8</sup> 51.7% are Christians, the other religions are 5.5%, the remaining are atheistic - or are not included in the census (Caritas Migrantes 2009). It should be noted that this data is an estimate based on nationality.

<sup>9</sup> The pluralism of Italy's Muslims reflects the entire geographic and geopolitical diversity of Islam (Spena 2010).

became clear that the Assembly was only a consultative body, far removed from the everyday lives and practices of Muslims.

To develop the work of the Assembly and to produce concrete actions, in 2006 the Interior Ministry Amato (centre-left) asked the Assembly to collaborate on the citizenship reform and to draw up a Charter of Values, like those written by other EU countries, in order to declare and confirm the principles of co-habitation between national citizens and foreigners. The aim of the Charter was to create a framework for conducting a positive dialogue between the Italian population and the foreigners, to promote the integration and the coexistence of different cultures and religions. However, some declarations within the Charter seem to be in contrast with cultural practices which are accepted in some Muslim contexts and communities, such as the prohibition of polygamy and arranged marriages, or the use of clothes that cover the face<sup>10</sup>.

The most recent initiative is the creation of the Committee for Italian Islam. It is a new body, established with a decree dated 10<sup>th</sup> February 2010, and consists of 19 members. They are from different countries, they are experts in religions and particularly in Islam, some are representatives of Islamic organizations, others are teachers of Islamic law or Ecclesiastic law. Their task is to formulate concrete proposals to address the issues of Mosques, Imam training, mixed marriages, the use of specific clothes and in particular of veils, etc. The general aim is to propose solutions to achieve integration, to let people exercise their civil rights, to promote co-habitation while respecting the Italian Constitution and laws.

Besides the Muslim organizations and the representatives who are part of the institutional bodies cited above, in Italy there are many places of worship which exist at a grass-roots level. These places are not always recognized and tolerated, but they produce various reactions, from opposition to tolerance, which also depends on the political climate or on events reported in the news.

Permission to use some places to pray, to meet, to teach the Islamic culture and religion to young people are seen as ways the Muslims use to increase their power and visibility, and in extreme cases as a place where it is possible to recruit terrorists. The Italian state does not respond to the Muslims' claims in a structured way, but on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with relations between the local institutions and Muslims. In fact the State has never adopted a clear position on how to address the presence and the claims of Muslims, who undermine the traditional notion of identity and citizenship that are bound to the nation state, and its unity of language, religion, and culture.

The way the Italian State addresses the issue of the building of Mosques is an example of its difficulty in managing diversity, and in particular religious diversity.

In Italy only three Mosques are officially recognised, one in Milan (north), the second in Rome (centre) and the third in Catania (south). However, there are many other places of worship. The Interior Ministry estimates that there are 258 places of worship, the Central Direction of Police Prevention estimates 735 (Ismu Report 2010). In recent years in many Italian cities the Muslim communities have asked for these places to be officially recognised or have asked for permission to build new Mosques, but their claims have been met with opposition from Italian citizens and from some political forces (like the Northern League in Padua or in Milan).

It is interesting to note that in Italy the construction of places of worship is regulated by national and regional laws. In compliance with these laws, the municipalities should, in their urban plans, identify some areas to be designated as religious buildings/places of worship, based on the needs of the local population and on the demands of religious communities. The size of these places of worship is proportional to the size of the religious community that has requested them. Although the legislation permits the construction of places of worship or the conversion of existing places into places of worship, the Muslim communities encounter a lot of difficulties in doing this. An example is

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<sup>10</sup> An interesting contribution about these issues can be found in Spena (2010).

the Mosque in Viale Jenner in Milan, which has been at the core of political and public debate for a long time. The problem arose when the citizens who live near the Mosque began to protest against the large number of people who went to the Mosque, occupying public property and the roads, creating traffic congestion. After continuous disputes between the Municipality and the Muslims, it was decided to give the Muslims a sports hall, which they still use today. The Muslim community is not happy with this solution but it is the only one on offer.

The problems about the construction of Mosques reflect what has been found by recent research carried out by the Interior Ministry (2008). The research findings outline that 55.3% of Italians interviewed consider migration from Islamic countries to be the most problematic, because Muslims bear more visible social, religious and cultural differences. It is pointed out that the respondents emphasize the cultural and religious problems regarding relations with Muslims<sup>11</sup>. Secondly, 31.4% of Italians interviewed are against the building of Mosques.

Besides the building of Mosques, another important question is the education of second generations. In Italy the number of young people of foreign origin has been increasing more and more in the last decade (they represent 21,7% of all the foreign population and they have come to represent 7.9% of all the students in Italian schools (Caritas Migrantes 2011). The education system has to consider the presence of children of different cultures and to learn to relate to the foreign families.

In this scenario, the construction of Islamic schools has created objections and opposition. We refer to the school in Via Quaranta in Milan, which was at the centre of political and public debate for a long time, until its closure. This school began about 15 years ago, and it contained a nursery school, a primary and a secondary school. The aim of the school was not only to teach Islam and Arabic to children (especially Egyptians), but also to prepare them for the final exams at the Egyptian Embassy. These exams were recognised in the country of origin and children sat them because the families' aim was to go back home. To avoid educational segregation and the discontinuity in children's education careers, a project of integration was promoted with the support of the Regional Education Department and the Milan Municipality. The programme that was implemented consisted of Italian language courses within the school, language teaching for Italian and Egyptian students, exam preparation for children and young people. Nevertheless, the Municipality unexpectedly began a campaign to close the school. The reasons used to justify the need to close the school were the inadequacy of the building and the lack of hygiene. Besides these reasons it was also stated that the school was not recognised by the state and that the best integration for children is through attendance of Italian state schools. The common fear is that the school becomes a ghetto. Although the Muslim families protested publicly, in September 2005 the school closed and the children were obliged to go to state schools or they were sent to their country of origin.

After the closure of the school in Via Quaranta, attempts were made to open another school in Via Ventura, on the outskirts of Milan, in 2006. This school also encountered many difficulties before it could open: there were bureaucratic problems (i.e.: permission to use the spaces for educational purposes or the official declaration that the building could be used) that nevertheless hid ideological reasons. After overcoming all these difficulties, the school opened and continues to operate today.

#### *2.4.5 Chinese*

Migration from China to Italy is a very old phenomenon. The first flux of migration was in the 1920s, when a group of Chinese immigrants from the Zhejiang province arrived in Milan, after having worked in French firms during the First World War. A second flux arrived in the 1980s (from Fujian, a province near Zhejiang) and a third in the last few years. This flux is characterized by two kinds of

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<sup>11</sup> Usually when we deal with the issues regarding migrants, the biggest problem which is emphasized is the public security, secondly the competition in the labour market (Valtolina 2004, 2005).

people. Firstly, those who lived in the North of China and who worked in industries and mines that had failed and closed. These are economic migrants and they are the largest group. Secondly, those who also come from northern China but who are young bachelors, and whose aim is to continue their studies in Italy (Caritas Migrantes 2009).

The Chinese population is very young. Most Chinese are between 25 and 40 years old, the average age is 30, and the migrants over 60 years represent 0.74% of the total (Caritas Migrantes 2009). Children aged under 1 year old are equal in number to people aged between 25 and 35 years old. The Chinese population, therefore, has a high birth rate. At the same time there is a tendency to send children to China to study, and this fact is backed up by the decrease in children aged between 2 and 10 years old. After the age of 10, children tend to come back to Italy.

The Chinese are also one of the largest minority groups in Italy. It is the fourth group in size (see table 1), even though they represent only 4.6% of all immigrants (Caritas Migrantes 2011). They are concentrated in certain Italian areas, situated especially in the north or in central Italy, such as Milan, Prato or Rome (Istat 2010). Almost half the Chinese workers are self-employed (53.4%), the others are employed permanently (40.2%) or temporarily (6.4%). As regards the sectors, 64.3% are employed in the service sector and 32.1% in the industrial sector. Among those who are employed in the service sector, 34.3% work as traders, 21.9% work in restaurants and hotels and 4.3% do domestic work in families (Caritas Migrantes 2011). The Chinese are mostly entrepreneurs in the retail trade and in the textile sector.

In the last 10 years a wave of discrimination has arisen against Chinese. In particular there are various social representations of them which circulate throughout the mass media and public opinion. Research conducted by the Interior Ministry (2008) describes the main social representations of the Chinese and tries to deconstruct them.

Generally, the Chinese are considered unfair competitors in the labour market: Chinese companies are accused of dodging tax and overworking their employees. Commonly it is thought that Chinese entrepreneurs exploit their compatriots, they make them work for many hours a day and they pay low salaries. In this way they can compete with Italian firms which work as subcontractors and they can offer their goods to Italian firms on the basis of lower prices than those of Italian subcontractors. However, the main thing that worries Italians is the industriousness of the Chinese and probably the argument about unfair competition is used to justify this worry.

But there are also other false beliefs. For example it is a commonly held public opinion that there are powerful mafia organizations that control Chinese immigration. This belief arose because the Chinese often have liquid capital, consequently this is seen as an indicator of illegal activities. However, we could suppose that the fear of the growing economic power of China leads people to think that the Chinese conduct illegal business. Another false belief is that the Chinese hide the bodies of the dead in order to recycle their documents and resident permits. However, the Chinese who live in Italy are on average very young (the average age for women is 29 years, and 31 years for men). Secondly, the Chinese prefer to go back home when they grow old or when they have to be cared for, and they want to live out their days in China.

Nevertheless, all the beliefs described here are social representations and are not reflected in the reality. The fears about Chinese, i.e. China's growing economic power, their industriousness and ability to compete with Italian firms, the difficulties in communicating with them, the closure of Chinese communities, all lead to the construction of negative and false stereotypes. Furthermore, these social representations are linked to actual discriminatory practices, as the IOM (International Organization for Migrations) research (2008) outlines. There it is pointed out that 23% of first generation Chinese declare that they have been victims of discrimination, and 59% of second generation Chinese declare this. The second generation Chinese also declare that besides the discrimination there are other problems: work, isolation and depression, difficult relations with Italians.

An interesting example of discriminatory behaviour towards the Chinese is the approach adopted by the Milan Municipality for the Paolo Sarpi neighbourhood, called the Chinatown of Milan. It is an area situated in the city centre, where the Chinese started to settle in 1920 and where they opened their commercial activities. In the last few decades their activities have continued to develop and to extend in the neighbourhood, changing the aspect of this historical area of Milan. The activities themselves also changed, because Italian crafts were replaced by Chinese wholesalers. Some inhabitants of the neighbourhood and some local politicians claimed that the wholesalers were incompatible with the urban structure of the neighbourhood, and that the area had become congested because of the number of vans and trucks circulating at all hours of the day. So, the Municipality decided to adopt a policy in order to restrict the traffic and to control the Chinese wholesalers. The Municipality's decision was encouraged by the Italian citizens, who opposed the growing presence of Chinese and organized many demonstrations against them.

Some restrictive ordinances were passed and a policy of control began in the neighbourhood. But on 12th April 2007 the discriminatory practices reached a climax, when a Chinese woman was fined by the police for having disobeyed the restriction. The fact caused conflict between the police and the Chinese, and resulting in some injuries. After the conflict, which some newspapers and mass media unfairly compared to the French riots in the banlieues, the Municipality continued to sustain its restrictive policy. Nowadays the neighbourhood is an area where the access of cars and vans is limited to certain hours during the day and only with authorization. The Chinese wholesale business has been penalized by these restrictions and the relations between the Milan Municipality and the Chinese community have worsened. Furthermore, the Municipality wants to transfer Chinese businesses and activities to other areas in the city, in the periphery, but these areas refuse to accept the migrants.

In addition to the Milan case we could cite the situation of Prato, where the Chinese settled in a neighbourhood (via Pistoiese) and developed their commercial activities, transforming the area into a so-called China-town. As in Milan, where a neighbourhood committee was set up to defend the neighbourhood from Chinese "colonization", in Prato the Committee of via Pistoiese also began a campaign against the Chinese many years ago. The major concern was the Chinese entering the textile sector and competition with Italian firms. Chinese firms are accused of employing workers illegally, of exploiting workers, and of not respecting the legislation. In the citizens' opinion, the crisis among textile firms is partly caused by the Chinese black economy and they have asked the government to intervene to save the Italian firms. Public protests culminated in March 2009, when a demonstration was organized by the citizens to attract the attention of the institutions and to receive the support of the government and the region. The public protest was supported by the centre-right political forces, which managed to win the municipal elections because of a campaign against the Chinese. For the first time the left-wing parties lost the election, after 63 years of government. In the following months many checks on Chinese textile firms and commercial activities were carried out by the police, supported by the newly elected municipality.

Besides these two local contexts, where the difficulties of relations between Italians and Chinese come to light clearly, at a more general level it can also be said that the approach of Italians towards Chinese is suspicious or intolerant. In a representative sample of Italians over 15 years old (Diamanti 2007)<sup>12</sup>, 43% did not have confidence in the Chinese and confidence has decreased over the last few years. Generally, half of Italians have no confidence in foreigners, and the two major fears are that immigrants threaten Italian identity, culture and religion (35%), or the employment of Italians (34%).

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<sup>12</sup> Demos-coop research, available on [www.agcom.it](http://www.agcom.it)

#### *2.4.6. Roma*

Roma are an ancient minority in Italy. This minority is very heterogeneous and includes Italian citizens, refugees, irregular migrants, EU citizens and stateless people. All these subgroups are different from each other not only in terms of their legal status but also in their history, language and migration processes: there are Rom, Sinti, Rom Harvati, Rom Khorakhanè, etc.

Based on a report written by Caritas Migrantes (2006), in the European Union there are about 9 million Roma, but in Italy they are only 120.000-150.000 of them. It is an estimate, because there are no official statistics about the size of the Roma population. It is certain that a large number of Roma living in Italy have Italian citizenship and they naturalized many years or even centuries ago. In addition to these, a lot of Roma arrived in Italy after 1990 from the Balkans. These people came from foreign countries and emigrated to escape from wars, famine, economic and political crises and ethnic discrimination. In their countries of origin they were sedentary and not nomad. Generally, the estimated number of Roma who are nomad is about 15% to 30% of all Roma who live in Italy. Despite this fact, the definition of “nomad” is usually used to define the Roma. It is commonplace to marginalize and label them, to define their diversity in terms of the majority.

The presence of Roma led the Italian state to implement the housing policy of “camps”: some areas which were situated on the outskirts of the cities, which should have been temporary but which became permanent without being suitable places to live in. In addition to these authorized “camps”, other areas were occupied illegally by people: cultivated fields, public areas, private properties, etc. All these solutions are precarious and they could influence the quality of life of people (work, health, education...). At the same time, they attract the attention of the Italian citizens who live near these areas and lead them to react. When the camps are illegal, with poor hygienic conditions, built in unhealthy and dangerous places, Italians strongly react and oppose them, demanding their demolition. By contrast, when the institutions propose the construction of authorized camps (with electricity and other facilities), Italians are more willing to accept the camps, as long as they are built outside the city or on the outskirts. The aim is to remove the problem and to confine Roma to the edges of society.

The public protests against the Roma and their camps began in 2006-2007 in many Italian cities and it was sustained by some political forces. Although hostile and discriminatory attitudes towards Roma have existed for a long time, in 2006-2007 a series of anti-Roma manifestations broke out.

It is interesting to provide an example by illustrating a shocking but significant event that happened in Milan. After being forcibly evicted from a camp, the Roma were transferred temporarily to an area situated on the outskirts of Milan (Opera), and were accommodated in tents. But the solution adopted, despite being temporary, provoked a violent reaction on the part of some citizens who organized several demonstrations and in the end burned the tents set up for the Roma by the National Civil Defence. The arson attack was promoted by some representatives of local political forces (in particular the Northern League), who also participated in the event. In 2008 the local representative of the Northern League, Ettore Fusco, was elected Mayor of Opera Municipality. On the other hand, the Opera Parish priest, who was in favour of welcoming the Roma and who had protested against the violent behaviour of the Italians, had to be transferred to another city.

Another event that provoked a violent reaction among citizens and that was sustained by the political forces was the murder in Rome of an Italian woman by a young Romanian man who lived in a Roma Camp. The crime became the pretext of the start of a campaign against Roma and Roma camps. The demonstrations have occasionally been extremely violent resulting into setting fire to Roma camps, without any real protection provided by the police who have also carried out violent Roma camp raids. The demonstrations have received the direct or indirect support of certain political forces and mass media. The result of all these campaigns against Roma was the approval of an emergency decree in May 2008 which declared a state of emergency in three Italian Regions. The Decree “Declaration of the state of emergency in relation to settlements of the nomad communities in

Campania, Lazio and Lombardy” ordered the Prefects to assume the function of “Special Commissioners” with the duty to: 1) monitor and authorize settlements 2) carry out censuses of the persons living therein 3) adopt measures against convicts that may live therein 4) adopt measures of eviction 5) identify new areas where adequate settlements may be built 6) adopt measures aimed at social cohesion, including schooling. To carry out a census of Roma who live in the camps the proposal was made to fingerprint people of all ages, including children. The proposal was contested by some political forces and organizations - both at a national and an international level - condemning the discriminatory nature of this initiative. After a long debate in the European Parliament, the Italian government was urged not to take the fingerprints of Roma and not to subject them to a census.

The Italian state has been criticized not only for the matter of fingerprints, but generally for its policy and attitude towards Roma. For example the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) criticized the Italian approach to Roma, which is characterized by prejudice, and condemned not only the physical isolation, but also the political, cultural and economic segregation of camps.

Despite the criticisms and the recommendations, policies and attitudes towards Roma have not changed. As regards the policies, the forced evictions of Roma camps continue in many Italian cities, such as Milan or Rome. The forced evictions are justified by decrees and administrative initiatives and they are sustained by some political forces, such as the Northern League. An example is an agreement drawn up between the Mayor and the Prefect of Milan in May 2008, entitled “Patto per Milano sicura. Patto per la Sicurezza urbana tra il prefetto e il sindaco di Milano”. The two institutional actors undertook projects and actions aimed at containing and resolving the problems of Roma, the illegal buildings, violence towards women and children, the scams used on the elderly and the degradation of cities, and finally it aimed to favour the integration of immigrants. Another example is the “Piano nomadi” ( Plan for Nomads), signed in July 2009 by the Mayor and the Prefect of Rome, which was based on the 2008 decree. The Project planned the transfer of 6.000 Roma from their unauthorized camps to other authorized camps (called “villages”), situated on the outskirts of Rome. As a result of this plan, the biggest European Roma camp (called Casilino 900) was closed and its 600 Roma inhabitants were transferred to another camp. In the same way, other camps were closed and people were transferred to the “villages”.

Nevertheless, these initiatives have still not resolved the problem. Actual forced evictions of Roma camps are still occurring and a definitive solution has not yet been adopted<sup>13</sup>. In Milan for example 370 Roma camp evictions were carried out from 2006 to 2010, and they cost about 5 million Euros. The Municipality uses the evictions to demonstrate its interest in resolving the problem and in guaranteeing safety for its citizens. Nevertheless, every time the camps are evicted, Roma move to other camps and the problem is not resolved<sup>14</sup>.

As regards public opinion and the attitudes of Italians towards Roma and Roma camps, the tendency is to not tolerate Roma and the lifestyle that people imagine they have. The mass media sustains and reinforces prejudices and beliefs. An episode that shows the Italians’ intolerance towards Roma is their reaction to the suspected attempted kidnapping of an Italian baby by a 16 year old Roma girl in Naples. The girl did not mean to kidnap the baby, but she probably entered the house to steal and she had taken the baby to calm him down, not to kidnap him. But the old belief that Roma

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<sup>13</sup> The most recent eviction occurred on the outskirts of Milan in October 2010. Some civil society actors (such as the Foundation Casa della Carità or the cooperative Farsi Prossimo) signed an agreement with the Municipality in May 2010 to give some council flats to poor families. The organizations decided to give the flats to Roma families evicted from their camp, but the Municipality opposed this solution, even though the rent contracts were already signed. The event created a dispute but finally the Municipality found some private flats for Roma families.

<sup>14</sup> In October 2010 some citizens and civil society actors denounced the Mayor of Milan, Letizia Moratti, and her vice Mayor, De Corato, because they supposedly evicted Roma camps with the aim of discriminating against them ethnically and racially.

kidnap babies prevailed and, when the girl escaped, the neighbours managed to stop her and tried to lynch her. Finally, the girl was arrested. In the following days some Roma camps situated near Naples were burnt by Italian citizens and the Roma were obliged to escape<sup>15</sup>.

The negative attitudes of Italians towards Roma are confirmed by research conducted by Arrigoni and Vitale (2007). The research shows that 56% of Italians do not know how many Roma there are in Italy, 49% think they are not Italian and 84% think that they are nomads. Interestingly, they are the least welcome population group, since 81% do not like them very much or do not like them at all and only 6.7% like them. The attitudes toward Roma are based on a feeling of aversion (49%) or on the idea of poverty and marginalization (35%). The Roma are thieves, they are a closed group, they live in camps situated on the outskirts of cities by choice, they take advantage of children.

If we look at the Roma's 'differences' we could note that the most important aspect that is contested is their nomadic lifestyle. Regular migrants are accepted because they work, they are not involved in illegal activities and they obey the law; by contrast, Roma are discriminated against because the public opinion is that they do not want a house to live in and they do not want to work, but they prefer to be nomads and to steal. However, these social representations generalize behaviours that involve only certain members of a stigmatized group. For example, as we saw above, most Roma did not live as nomads in their countries of origin (e.g. those who come from the Balkans) or they have been sedentary for a long time. Above all, they do not work because their traditional jobs have disappeared, not because they prefer to steal: itinerant craft-making and commercial activities, musical or circus travelling exhibitions were typical of the past, but they are no longer suitable for the economic changes of the post industrial era. Besides this, some of them do not have permission to stay in Italy (e.g. those who come from the Balkans) or are discriminated against by employers. All these difficulties force them to find a job in the black economy and to do precarious or seasonal jobs. A typical job is to collect iron and recyclable materials, which is possible also because the camps are often situated near rubbish dumps. The women work as domestic workers, cultural mediators and peddlers.

Their nomadic life-style and their natural tendency to steal are two common beliefs. Another prejudice about Roma is about the women's conditions. It is believed that Roma societies are traditional, with a rigid division between men and women, where women are subordinated to men, and are not free to express their opinions and to work outside home. The findings of two research studies conducted by Caritas Ambrosiana and Ismu (Ambrosini-Tosi 2007, 2008) show that women often play an important role in Roma communities: they organize the activities within the camp, they take care of the children, they work inside and outside the camp, they are the link between the community and public services or charitable organizations.

So, besides the necessity to deconstruct prejudices and beliefs about Roma, it is most important to avoid the construction of legal or illegal camps and instead to implement housing policies.

## **2.5. Definitions of tolerance in Italy**

The issue of cultural and religious pluralism regarding immigrant populations is perceived in Italy as a socially relevant problem. The issue of cultural minorities' rights was previously marginal in public debate, due to the almost mono-linguistic and mono-religious composition of the country. The

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<sup>15</sup> Besides the strong reactions of Italians, it is interesting to report the court judgment towards the girl: she is "fully integrated in the typical schemes of Roma culture. Because she is completely integrated into those patterns of life, the risk that she will commit an offence again is concrete". This judgment seems to link the Roma culture and the likelihood of committing an offence in a cause-effect relation.



“problem” of the linguistic minorities was relegated to a just few areas near some national borders, whereas the issue of historically settled religious minorities (Jews and Protestants, especially Waldensian) was included in the historical dispute about the Catholic Church’s public role in Italy.

Among the fundamental elements that are useful for understanding the Italian situation, the electoral successes of the Northern League play a major role; the party’s political program has become increasingly characterized by hostility towards immigrants, which is manifested in the proposal to close borders to new immigrants and to impose cultural assimilation on legally resident immigrants. In addition to this, the 2001 terrorist attacks, together with those in Madrid and London, produced feelings of mistrust and closure among the public and the politicians, providing new elements in the Northern League’s approach and reinforcing its credibility in the public’s opinion, which was disoriented by the exceptional changes.

Support for the Northern League started in the Pre-Alps valleys, but in the first half of the 1990s it extended into all the northern regions, reaching greatest popularity in the Lombardy and Veneto regions. After the beginning of Silvio Berlusconi’s political career (1994) and after the creation of the centre-left alliance led by Romano Prodi (1996), support for the Northern League declined, remaining the same only in those areas where the party first gained popularity, i.e. in the Pre-Alps valleys. By contrast, in the last general elections, votes for the Northern League greatly increased once again and extended to the cities situated in *Pianura Padana*; moreover, votes started to spread also south of the river Po, in some regions that were traditionally left-oriented, such as Emilia-Romagna. The political campaigns against immigrants are a distinguishing cause, maybe the main one, of this advance of the Northern League even in those territories that up to a few years ago were not very sensitive to its cause. This kind of cause, based on the intolerance of immigrants, became hegemonic in the centre-right political alliance, with the only exception being a small minority led by the Chamber of Deputies’ president, Gianfranco Fini. During the right-wing government of 2006-2011, the Northern League was the only populist party in western Europe that formed part of the government, it controlled the all-important Ministry of the Interior, and carried out an aggressive anti-immigrant campaign together with certain political initiatives with a high symbolic impact, such as the so-called “security-package”. This was a package of regulations that mainly includes more severe sanctions against immigrants, especially against immigrants who are illegal residents. It also included the use of the army in order to safeguard the streets and the formation of “patrols” consisting of private citizens, volunteers, to help keep public order.

In terms of its cultural message, in the 1990s the Northern League began a political campaign based on alleged origins in the Celtic civilization and used new-pagan symbols. In the last few years it has modified its claims and its approach, declaring itself the defender of Catholic traditions by defending for example the presence of the crucifix in schools and in other public places, or the display of the nativity scene during the Christmas period, and so on. In this way, hostility towards the opening of places of worship for Muslims has gained even more power and more coherence, being a central point in Northern League’s political stance. The Northern League sees the Catholic religion as a civil religion, a symbol of the shared cultural traditions, a social unifying element for the territory, that is useful in promoting communitarian identification, but which is disengaged from the actual practice of religious rituals and values: a religion that is used to excluding people or to drawing a boundary between “us” and “them”. So the Northern League even opposes the Catholic ecclesiastic authorities when they preach openness and tolerance toward Muslims and other religious groups, and it presents itself as the real defender of the Catholic tradition.

The local administrations ruled by the Northern League party have been promoters of initiatives that may seem curious or clumsy, and that are often declared inadmissible by courts of justice, but that are incisive in the public opinion: the refusal to give lunch to primary school pupils whose families were not able to pay for the service; the “White Christmas” operation, to control and identify, house by house, the possible presence of illegal immigrants; the refusal to celebrate mixed marriages, with the pretext of the risk of “marriages of convenience”. These and other similar

initiatives appeared in the front pages of newspapers and in television news headlines, causing debate but then they normally disappeared. Nevertheless they communicated a message of suspicion and hostility toward immigrants (for a closer examination of the issue see chapter 3).

So we can say that religious and cultural tolerance in Italy has taken a few steps backwards over the last few years, especially in the northern regions: these regions are the richest and most developed in the country, and contain the highest immigrant populations, but also the most receptive to Northern League's message, which has become accepted almost uniformly by the all right-wing.

Also the local administrations led by centre-left alliances have a great deal of difficulty when they have to decide on suitable urban spaces for the construction of places of worship and Islamic cultural centres, and to grant the relevant permission.

Roma and Sinti minorities are experiencing similar difficulties. In this case, as we explained above, the conflict is especially related with two aspects: first, the security issue, which has enormously influenced the perception of immigration in general, and in particular the attitudes towards Tzigane minorities; second, the establishment of "camps" (both with and without authorization) for the accommodation of these groups, defined as "nomads", that are usually located in degraded areas of the urban peripheries. The spontaneous settlements consist of assembled huts without any bathrooms, not so different from the shanty towns found in large cities in poor countries. The periodical removal of these camps without the offer of feasible alternative solutions simply causes the inhabitants to move a few hundred meters away; in a year, removal after removal, the inhabitants come back to the original settlement.

In these conflicts, the Northern League has also led citizens' campaigns "for security", obtaining significant results over a long period of time in terms of visibility and electoral consensus. Open hostility towards a specific ethnic group has become a legitimate theme in public debate and it is used to justify mistreatment and violence. It may also be used to set "honest citizens" against "nomad predators". Anti-Tzigane prejudice is so strong and deep-rooted that it also involves politicians and political majorities belonging to the centre-left parties. Moreover it has generated political campaigns against Romanian immigration in general and has led to diplomatic tensions between Italy and Romania.

The case of Chinese immigration is different to some extent. Racist stereotypes and prejudices combine with an unheard-of fear for the economic efficiency and the commercial penetration capabilities of Chinese entrepreneurs. On the one hand, many Chinese restaurants, abandoned by clients, are obliged to become Japanese or even Italian restaurants. On the other hand, the peddlers in the urban markets, like the sellers in the clothing industry in Prato (Toscana), complain about the aggressive nature of their Chinese competitors, their access to ample capital, their ability to adopt working hours, salaries and working conditions that are unsustainable for Italian companies.

The persistent political opposition to immigration, that is sustained and powered by the Northern League, can be seen through regulation of citizenship processes. The following may serve as an example. Immigration laws were modified when Italy started to receive conspicuous flows of foreign immigration, eighty years after the approval of the original law (1912) and yet they were not modified during the fascist period. The reform particularly affected "non-EU" immigrants who were subject to stricter conditions than others. The Italian law in question, approved in 1992 and passed by Parliament almost unanimously, sets out different requirements (according to the country of origin) for minimum periods of residence before any application for citizenship can be made. Foreigners from EU countries are only required to have four years residence, while residence of ten years is needed for others (the so-called "*extracomunitari*", i.e. non-EU migrants), in comparison with the period of five years that was required of everyone under the previous law. Moreover processing the applications takes a long time (four years, on average) and the answer given by the authorities is discretionary (negative in most cases). The acquisition of citizenship, therefore, seems to be an obstacle race. By

contrast, the granting of citizenship through marriage is more easily obtained in Italy than in many other European countries.

The same law, which is based on a facilitated procedure for acquiring of Italian citizenship for the descendants of Italian emigrants to foreign countries, basically defines the boundaries of the Italian nation in ethnic terms. Giovanna Zincone (2006) used the expression “*familismo legale*” (transl.: legal familism): “Italianism” seems to be essentially a matter of blood relationships, a quality that is handed down through families, or a quality that can be acquired with marriage, thanks to a link with a partner belonging to the “tribe” of the Italians: in 2008, in Italy the percentage of citizenships acquired through marriage was 63% of the total number of citizenships granted (Caritas Migrantes 2011). Moreover in 2009 the total number (59.400) is much lower than that in other European countries that have older migratory flows, like France (135.800) and Germany (96.100), but also lower than the number of acquisitions in a country similar to Italy, e.g. Spain (79.600) (source: Eurostat).

At the same time, between 1998 and 2004 the opportunity to acquire citizenship for descendants of those who had emigrated a long time ago silently produced over half a million new citizens: the most numerous group were “returning” Italians from Argentina with around 236.000 acquisitions and from Brazil with 119.142.<sup>16</sup> It is important to stress the fact that these people are not defined as “immigrants”, even if they choose to come and live in Italy (rather than to use their Italian passports to migrate to Spain, Great Britain or the United States), although on the social level they may face some difficulties that are not so different from those the migrants classified as “foreigners” normally face. For example, their academic qualifications are not usually recognized (unlike what happens in Spain), and they have to look for low level positions in the labour market.

The right to vote went more or less the same way. Many years after the end of mass Italian emigration to foreign countries, in 2006 citizens resident in foreign countries obtained not only the right to vote, but also the chance to elect their own deputies and senators in reserved electoral constituencies, located in Latin America, Australia, the United States, Central and Northern Europe: members of Parliament that vote on laws about fiscal or public safety issues that are not applied to their electors. By contrast, foreign immigrants resident in Italy, even long term residents, do not have the right to vote in local administrative elections.

The present centre-right political majority is resisting any change regarding these two aspects and the centre-left parties were not able to find an agreement about the issue when they governed. The whole issue is also conditioned by the perception of widespread hostility to change on the part of the public.<sup>17</sup>

This reluctance has a clear symbolic dimension: Italy has trouble redefining itself as a multi-ethnic society. But it also has social and political consequences: without access to citizenship or the right to vote, it is very difficult for immigrants to demand their social and civil rights such as the freedom of worship. Consequently, the current pattern seems to be characterized by a decrease in tolerance, in contrast with an increase in the diversity which is transforming Italian society.

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<sup>16</sup> The system our country used to reduce even higher numbers of acquisitions, according to the law of 1992, among the descendants of Italian emigrants in areas such as Latin America, has been very simple: not to provide consulates with the necessary personnel to settle the matter.

<sup>17</sup> The most authoritative Italian daily paper, “*Corriere della Sera*”, usually a moderate voice of the Milanese bourgeois class, recently published a series of heated editorials by influential commentators such as Giovanni Sartori and Angelo Panebianco, against a parliamentary bipartisan proposal to reduce the number of years required to obtain the citizenship. The fundamental reason was the fear of potentially giving Muslim immigrants political influence. A slight change in position shortly afterwards (when the proposal was set aside) almost went unnoticed.

## **2.6. Concluding remarks**

Italy has become an immigration country only recently and it appeared unprepared to face the issues of cultural and religious diversity, although these matters were not new in Italy's history<sup>18</sup>.

The lack of awareness about migration can be found in public and political debates: in the Italian context "immigrants" were considered those who moved within the country, especially from the southern regions to the northern ones. From a juridical point of view, migrants did not exist and there was no legislation that regulated immigration flows (the first immigration law was only passed in 1986). As a consequence, immigration was regarded as a social problem, an emergency to be resolved quickly, without carrying out any fundamental changes in public policies.

Whereas the politicians adopted provisional solutions, such as the regularizations acts, immigrants entered the Italian labour market silently, they substituted Italian workers in "dirty, dangerous and demanding jobs", they covered the lack of support provided by the welfare state to the Italian families (by taking care of children and elderly, by substituting Italian women in domestic work), finally they entered the service sector<sup>19</sup>. In short, immigrants entered Italian society from the bottom and starting with the labour market.

However, although the economic integration of migrants (albeit in subordinated jobs) is emerging, a parallel change in the law and in policies has not happened. On the contrary, strong hostility towards migrants has spread, sustained by some political parties, such as the Northern League. So, in the current Italian context two different approaches to migrants have emerged: on the one hand political and public debate is characterized by the intolerance towards migrants; on the other hand, the labour market promotes their economic integration, whereas some civil society actors (Catholic organizations, trade unions, NGOs), also support their social integration. As a result, there is a deep discrepancy between the sphere of the market and migration policy, between the civil society actors and public or political debate. There is also a discrepancy between declared policies and applied policies, between common representations and the actual attitudes, behaviours and actions<sup>20</sup>.

In particular the political policies of the Northern League have for a long time acquired substantial support, based on "zero tolerance" –i.e. strict enforcement of the public safety rules, the need to fight against the illegal flows of migrants, and generally the hostility towards foreigners. Among the immigrant groups that are least tolerated are the Roma and Muslims, two groups that are considered a danger to public order and the safety of citizens. Nevertheless, the intolerance towards them is justified not only by the fact that they use urban spaces without formal authorization or they invade territories without the right to do so; they are also religiously or culturally different and they can not claim either recognition or rights.

In the same way, the Chinese are not tolerated because they are considered very different culturally; nevertheless, the hostility towards them is based not only in terms of these issues, but also because of fear of their economic efficiency and commercial capabilities. Competition in some economic sectors between Chinese and Italian entrepreneurs increases hostility and intolerance towards them.

In conclusion, religious and cultural tolerance in Italy has regressed over the last few years. Some events that repeatedly occur in local contexts, especially in the northern regions (where most immigrants live and where the Northern League enjoys wide support) demonstrate this. We refer to

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<sup>18</sup> We saw how the unification process of Italy happened: an annexation carried out by the Piedmont State, which included territories under its control with different histories and languages.

<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, they also entered the building trade, the restaurant industry, the retail sector and agriculture (Caritas Migrantes 2009, Inail 2010).

<sup>20</sup> In some public arenas the civil society actors oppose the typical representations and try to act in order to integrate migrants, such as in schools or in the public health services.

the dismantling of many Roma camps in Milan or Rome, prohibition or the difficulties in building mosques or places of worship, the closure of an Islamic school in Milan, the restrictive ordinances targeting the Chinese in Milan and Prato, etc.

Nevertheless, Italy can not oppose the transformation of society and the increase of diversity. It is necessary to take into account the social, cultural and economic changes that society is experiencing and the discrepancy between the policies declared and the public debate on the one hand, and the reality on the other.

### **3. Tolerance and diversity challenges in School life**

Italian schools were among the first public places in which Italian society faced the presence of students from ethnically, culturally and religiously different backgrounds. The transformation of schools into multi-ethnic and multi-religious places could not be avoided by education staff, who had to adapt school contexts to students' differences. In contrast with a political climate characterized by intolerant discourses (see chapter 2), in general the education system has tried to adapt by making schools meaningful for students of foreign origin.

In this chapter, therefore, the challenges that the cultural diversity of students brings to the education system is analysed, paying particular attention to two aspects: the accommodation of diversity in everyday school life and the creation of faith schools. Both aspects reveal how Italy deals with diversity and accommodates (or does not accommodate) minorities' claims.

To do this, two key events were chosen which challenged school life and social cohesion within schools and provoked heated debate in the political and public arena. The first issue, which is linked to the accommodation of diversity in school life, is the proposal of the Northern League party in 2008 to create separate classes for immigrant students. The second issue concerns the structure of the Italian education system and the possibility of creating faith schools. The Italian system is in fact based on state schools. Private schools are very few in number and are mostly Catholic. But a few years ago a Muslim minority in Milan built its own school, provoking public and political debates about their right to have their own school, with its own language (Arabic) and different curricula. The example of this school shows that the issue of faith schools will grow over the next few years and will become a disputed topic in the Italian public and political agenda.

In the first part of the chapter an overview on the history and changes of the Italian education system is given, paying attention to the transformations introduced because of the presence of immigrant students.

The core of the chapter is divided into two parts: the first part deals with the accommodation of diversity in everyday school life, going deeply into the key event of "preparatory classes" and presenting the results of the empirical research. In the second part, the case of the Muslim school in Milan is described, paying attention to the discourses used by those who opposed the school and those who favoured it.

In the last part of the chapter the findings are analysed in order to understand how the Italian education system has dealt with accommodating cultural and religious diversity within schools.

#### **3.1. The history of the Italian education system and the intercultural approach**

The Italian education system was founded in 1859, some years before the political unitarian process carried out by the Piedmont State. The Minister of Education of the Sardinia Realm Gabrio Casati planned a unitarian education system, controlled and organized by the State. The first aim was to overcome the previous territorial divisions and to build a national consciousness; the second aim was to keep under control the education process, regardless of the Catholic Church's influence, which had

been predominant in the previous centuries<sup>21</sup>. The Casati law was first implemented in the Sardinia Reign and it was extended to the entire new Italian State only later.

In 1923 the first reform of the Italian education system was implemented by Giovanni Gentile, who reorganized the structure of the education system, applying sweeping measures to schools and to the assessment of students' performances. Gentile legitimized private catholic schools, but it was only after the Second World War that the issue of private schools was brought up for political discussion. After the debate carried on during the drafting of the Constitution it was decided to guarantee the right of private organizations to build schools, without any tax burden for the State (art. 33 of the Italian Constitution). Consequently, in Italy most schools were public, but there were also private schools, funded and controlled by the Catholic Church in particular.

The Italian education system did not change until 2000, when the Minister of Education Luigi Berlinguer implemented a reform of the education system (Law 30, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2000). One of the most important changes introduced by the Minister was the autonomy of schools: every school was autonomous as regards its organization (art. 21, Law 59/1997): the Ministry of Education set out general national guidelines and established the core curriculum, but every school could develop its own programme and curricula, could decide how to distribute the total number of school hours, how to provide in-service teacher training and how to set up teaching programmes for groups of students. The Berlinguer reform also introduced the opportunity for private schools to receive public funding (D.M. 261/1998 and D.M. n. 279/1999)<sup>22</sup>. A clearer and more systematic regulation of this issue was introduced in 2000 by Law 62, which let private schools be considered equal to public schools and enter the national education system. Through a specific procedure<sup>23</sup> private schools could ask to be officially recognised and to be considered as public schools, also regarding their tax regime and their right to receive funding.

But the history and the changes of the Italian education system follow the succession of various governments. Educational reform has always been an awkward political issue: every government wanted to implement some changes and to boast about its actions, but a shared solution has not been found yet. After the centre-left government of 1996-2001 (during which the Berlinguer reform was introduced), in 2001 the election was won by the centre-right coalition, which implemented the third reform of the school system (called the Moratti reform, Law 53/2003)<sup>24</sup>. Another attempt to implement reforms was made by the Minister of Education Fioroni in 2006, under the centre-left government. Finally, the most recent changes have been made by Minister Gelmini and they are still in progress.

Despite the adhesion to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and the commitment to guarantee equality for all students, the Italian education system struggles to implement these values, and hands over the responsibility for putting them into practice to teachers.

By adhering to the Convention, the Italian education system reaffirmed its character of an egalitarian and inclusive system, where all students were considered in the same way, they had the same rights and they had to be respected equally<sup>25</sup>. The principle of universalism which characterized

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<sup>21</sup> Traditionally education was managed by ecclesiastic institutions.

<sup>22</sup> A D.M. (Ministerial Decree) is an administrative act promulgated by a Ministry. It provides technical rules for the application of a law.

<sup>23</sup> Private schools that want to be formally recognised have to explicitly apply for legal recognition and they have to satisfy specific requirements (i.e. teachers have to be qualified; the school has to have an educational approach that is in line with the Italian Constitution, etc.).

<sup>24</sup> The Moratti reform changed the curricula radically.

<sup>25</sup> The example of disabled is meaningful: Italian law guarantees children the right to be educated and to attend school, from nursery to university; it provides personal programmes for the disabled within the school, organized by teachers in collaboration with the family and the National Health System; finally it guarantees learning support teachers for them.

the Italian education system and which was reasserted by the Convention of the Rights of the Child was also applied to students of foreign origin<sup>26</sup> by the '80s-'90s.

This principle implies that the right to be educated has to be recognised and guaranteed for all students, regardless of their citizenship, the legal status of their parents and their presence or absence on Italian territory. Secondly, the universalistic approach ensures equal opportunities for all children as regards access to the education system, schools' performance and curriculum counselling.

Consequently, the presence of children of foreign origin has been managed by including them in mainstream classes and without creating special classes for them. Some remedial lessons have been organized to support Italian language learning for immigrant children but they are usually short-lasting and they do not substitute the mainstream classes totally.

In the '80s-'90s the term *interculturalism* became salient in the school context, discourses and official documents. With this term the Italian education system wanted to outline the importance of dialogue and exchange among people who were culturally different, in order to avoid conflict and to favour coexistence. *Intercultural education* was seen as the most important way of preventing racism and intolerance, and of supporting democratic values (C.M. 205/1990)<sup>27</sup>; it entailed the revision of curricula and the use of suitable teaching aids, such as bilingual texts and books (C.M. 73/1994). The attention of the Italian State and the education system to interculturality was also pointed out in Immigration Law n. 286/1998 (the so-called Turco-Napolitano law). In the law, it was outlined that schools are the best contexts for implementing intercultural projects, whose aim is "to enhance the linguistic and cultural differences, and promote initiatives of hospitality and cultural exchange" (art. 36). In the same period (1997) the "National Commission for intercultural education" was created by the Ministry of Education (it remained active until 2001). The aim was to set up a team of experts who would analyse and address the problems regarding intercultural education. The Commission wrote a document which outlined that intercultural education had to be considered the normal approach to teaching at school and had to be integrated into the regular school programmes. To achieve intercultural education, funding was set aside for teachers who were committed to supporting immigrant students (C.M. 155/2001).

The intercultural approach is therefore seen as the only way to achieve integration among students of different origins at school. The concepts of tolerance and acceptance are not considered, discussed or thematised in Italian education policy, among education staff, pedagogists or teachers. To be tolerant and to accept differences are not enough to favour integration but they are needed to enhance diversities. Tolerance and acceptance are "weak" concepts, in contrast to a "strong" concept, i.e. interculturality.

Despite the various reforms of the education system, the intercultural approach has remained a shared principle, by both the right-wing and left-wing government coalitions. Interculturalism is considered a prescriptive method to achieve integration by all political forces and opposition to it does not exist. Nevertheless, it is a vague and generic concept, which can be interpreted in various ways (for example, some people consider intercultural to be simply the provision of language courses, others see it as a process of assimilations, etc.). For this reason, it has never been brought into question, but it has been always enhanced by the various Ministries of Education at an ideological level. In the wake of this some important documents have been presented, e.g. the C.M. 24/2006 ("Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign students") and the document "The Italian

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<sup>26</sup> Immigrant children and children who were born in Italy to immigrant parents (the second generation) are considered foreigners and they acquire the citizenship of their parents (in Italy *ius sanguinis* is in force). In the Italian educational system they are called "students with non-Italian citizenship". Only those born in Italy and resident in Italy since birth can apply for Italian citizenship when they are 18 years old.

<sup>27</sup> The C.M. (Circular Letter) is a text, issued autonomously by a Minister, which does not have to be voted on or discussed at Chambers. It provides regulations to its subordinate offices: it contains the clarifications or instructions needed to implement a rule or to guarantee its uniform application in every subordinate office.



strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origin” (written in 2007). The first document provides an overview of actions and measures for the integration of foreign students. The emphasis is clearly placed on foreign students and the document has mainly practical purposes: the instructions regard administrative procedures (administrative area), relations with families (relational-communicative area), and educational approaches with foreign students (educational area). Among all the instructions, the document highlights the fact that students of foreign origin have to attend mainstream classes to be integrated, because participation in a class where there are Italian students favours language learning.

The document “The Italian strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origin” was written in 2007 by the “National Observatory for the integration of students of foreign origin and for intercultural integration”. The observatory – which was set up in 2006 - consists of a team of experts who usually deal with the issues of interculturality and integration, and who have developed strategies, guidelines and recommendations to deal with foreign students at school. The document is divided into two parts: in the first part some principles and values are quoted, such as universalism, the centrality and the importance of human beings, interculturality; in the second part 10 actions which characterize the “Italian model of intercultural integration” are drawn up and explained. One of these actions includes a recommendation to implement training courses for head-teachers to learn the skills required for managing foreign students at school, and to organize classes where Italian is taught to foreign students. This last proposal has been implemented recently, by the C.M. 807/2008 (“National Plan for teaching Italian as a second language”). The main aim was to help foreign students who have been in Italy for two years (or less) to learn Italian, especially those who are attending secondary schools.

Besides funding, every year the Ministry of Education gives funds to schools which are located in high-risk areas or areas where immigrants are concentrated, to avoid student marginalization and dropping out of school. However, the principles and the purposes are ambitious and the concrete actions required are difficult to carry out. There is little and inadequate investment, so the good practices tested and implemented in some schools could not be extended to other schools.

The approach adopted towards foreign students was also applied towards other types of cultural and linguistic differences, i.e. the native minorities. Indeed, these minorities are protected by law (specifically, Law 482/1999) and they have some specific rights to protect and maintain their dialect and culture<sup>28</sup>. Specifically, in the school context they could implement courses during the mainstream classes to teach the language and the culture of the minority, and they could also use the dialect to teach subjects to students. Native minorities receive funding to teach their dialects at school<sup>29</sup>, to enhance their diversity and identity, to promote dialogue among different cultures and remove mistrust from others.

### **3.2. Italian schools today**

Despite many reforms, the Italian education system struggles to apply the principle of universalism towards foreign students (as we saw in the previous paragraph), regardless of their origins, nationality, cultural differences and legal status<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Before law 482/99 only the Francophones in the Valle d’Aosta region, the Germans in Trentino Alto Adige, the Slovenes in the cities of Trieste and Gorizia were juridically and politically recognised (by special statutes and regional laws). The other minorities were recognised only at a local level (by a few national laws and some regional laws).

<sup>29</sup> We could cite the recent C.M. 70/2009 and the C.M. 58/2010, which set funding aside for organizing projects to teach dialects and minority cultures.

<sup>30</sup> Foreign children have the right to enter Italian schools even if they (and/or their parents) are illegal migrants.

Specifically, as regards foreign students, the aim of this inclusive and egalitarian approach is to enhance their differences, to consider their diversity as richness and let them have the same opportunities as Italian students. Based on these principles, Italian schools are used to placing foreign students immediately in mainstream classes. For students who have been in Italy for 2 years (or less), there are courses to learn Italian, which are attended during school time. These students attend the mainstream classes and at specific times in the school day they leave the mainstream classes and attend the Italian courses, managed by a teacher who is called “the linguistic facilitator”<sup>31</sup>.

The autonomy of schools introduced by the Berlinguer reform let them organize curricula and pedagogy and use funding quite freely<sup>32</sup>. Consequently, schools could organize remedial courses based on their own decisions and needs. The autonomy is positive on the one hand, because schools are free to adapt curricula in relation to the presence of foreign students (and in relation to their nationalities, their religion, their length of residence in Italy, their number in the school, etc.). On the other hand it is negative, because it produces differences among schools: schools which are more welcoming and open-minded to foreign students will probably be the schools where most foreign students will want to go, creating imbalance between schools.

To avoid the concentration of foreign students and the formation of ghetto-school or ghetto-classes the Ministry of Education’s guidelines suggest that Italian schools distribute foreign students equally. However, it is not always possible, due to many factors. Here we would like to cite two of them: firstly, families can enrol their children in any school, regardless of their place of residence; secondly, the head-teachers can influence the distribution of students (i.e. if there are too many requests for enrolment, they can refuse to enrol children). So, despite the Ministry’s instructions and despite the fact that interviewees say that they try to distribute students equally, the research (Santerini 2008) shows that there is often an unequal distribution of foreign students in Italian schools.

In this context, private schools are even more different from public schools. Firstly, in Italy private schools are mostly Catholic schools. Indeed out of all the private schools (which represent about 18% of all Italian schools in 2007/2008, according to Istat data), more than half are Catholic schools<sup>33</sup>. Apart from Catholic schools, there are very few faith schools in Italy. This fact depends on the characteristics of the Italian context: as everybody knows, in Italy Catholicism is by far the most widespread religion and the other religions are in the minority. So the demand for faith schools is especially about Catholic schools and it is very low for other kinds of faith schools (for example in the city of Milan there is only one formally recognised Jewish school). Nevertheless, Catholicism has always been part of the Italian education system: although in the 1980s by the revision of the Lateran Treaty (1929) Catholicism was no longer considered the religion of the State and it was removed as a compulsory school subject, it remained part of the school curricula.

Private schools are mostly attended by Italians, whereas foreign students attend public schools and, among secondary schools, they mainly attend professional or technical schools<sup>34</sup>.

Generally, in the 2010/2011 academic year there were 709,826 foreign students, which corresponded to 7.9% of the student population<sup>35</sup>. Foreign students have increased notably in the last

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<sup>31</sup> The number of linguistic facilitators has decreased in the last few years. For example in the Milan province the number of linguistic facilitators decreased from 1 for 50 students in 1990/2000 to 1 for 600 in 2008/2009 (Caritas/Migrantes 2009). It is interesting to note that the data are in contrast with the increase of foreign students in the last few years.

<sup>32</sup> However, the recent reform implemented by Minister Gelmini has reduced funding considerably.

<sup>33</sup> Especially nursery schools.

<sup>34</sup> Among foreign students enrolled on secondary schools, 40.4% are enrolled in professional schools and 38% in technical schools (Miur 2011).

<sup>35</sup> The Ministry of Education collects data about foreign students every year. In its survey all students with foreign citizenship are counted, therefore second generations are included. In fact in Italy second generations can apply for Italian citizenship only when they are 18 years old, and if they have been living in Italy since they were born (see also note 7).

few years: they accounted for only 0.7% of all students in 1996/1997 and the increase has been seen across all the age ranges (tab. 1 and graph.1). In 2010/2011, among all foreign students, there were 299,475 (42.2%) second generation students (those born in Italy to foreign parents) and they are concentrated in nursery and primary schools<sup>36</sup> (tab. 2).

Foreign students live mainly in the Northern regions and are of many nationalities. The largest groups are the Romanians, the Albanians and the Moroccans. These three groups represent about 45% of all foreign students.

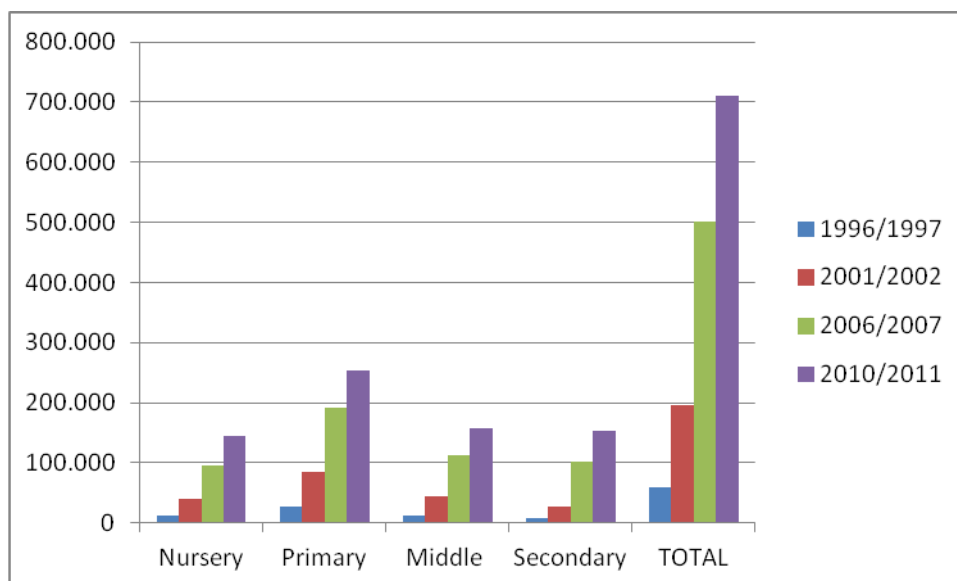
**Table 1: Foreign students per school sector (absolute values and percentage), from 1996/1997 to 2010/2011**

School years	Nursery	Primary	Middle	Secondary	TOTAL
<b>Absolute values</b>					
<b>1996/1997</b>	12,809	26,752	11,991	7,837	59,389
<b>2001/2002</b>	39,445	84,122	45,253	27,594	196,414
<b>2006/2007</b>	94,712	190,803	113,076	102,829	501,420
<b>2010/2011</b>	144,457	253,756	157,980	153,633	709,826
<b>%</b>					
<b>1996/1997</b>	0.8	1.0	0.6	0.3	0.7
<b>2001/2002</b>	2.5	3.0	2.5	1.1	2.2
<b>2006/2007</b>	5.7	6.8	6.5	3.8	5.6
<b>2010/2011</b>	8.6	9.0	8.8	5.8	7.9

**Table 2: Immigrant School Population in Italy, 2010-2011 (Miur 2011)**

School sector	Foreign pupils (% of student population)	%	Second generation (% of foreign student population)	%
<b>Nursery</b>	8.6	20.4	78.4	37.8
<b>Primary</b>	9.0	35.7	53.1	45.0
<b>Middle</b>	8.8	22.3	23.8	12.6
<b>Secondary</b>	5.8	21.6	9.0	4.6
<b>TOTAL%</b>	7.9	100.0	42.20	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	709,826	709,826	299,475	299,475

<sup>36</sup> Second generation students are the youngest among all children of immigrant origin, they do not attend school or they are in the lower levels of the educational system. If we look at the number of immigrant children resident in Italy, the second generations represent more than half of the total (650,802 out of a total of 993,238 – Caritas Migrantes 2011).

**Graph 1: Foreign students per school sector (absolute values), from 1996/1997 to 2010/2011**

The academic achievements of foreign students are worse than those of Italian students, and the differences are greater in secondary schools. The failure rate of foreign students is 18.2% in primary schools, compared to 2% of Italians, it is 47.9% in middle schools, compared to 8.5% of Italians, and finally it is 70.6% in secondary schools, compared to 25% of Italian students (Miur 2011). The differences are due to many factors, not only to foreign students' linguistic difficulties. The migration paths of immigrant families and their high mobility in the country influence the academic achievements of children. The practice of admitting foreign students into classes which do not correspond to their age is another key factor. Italian law states that foreign students have to be admitted into classes which correspond to their age, but only after verifying their academic levels. Teachers often do not evaluate students' academic levels adequately and consequently they place them in lower classes. The foreign students' failure rate is also due to this *a priori* selection. It is worth noting that this practice is applied to students who are born abroad, of whom there are many in Italian schools, especially in upper high schools (tab. 2).

Foreign students are not distributed equally among schools. In the academic year 2009-2010 26.2% of schools have no foreign students, in 47% of schools foreign students account for 10% of all students. Only 2.8% of schools have more than 30% of foreign students (Miur 2010).

Because of the number of foreign students and their unequal distribution among schools, two proposals have been made in recent years. The first was the motion of Cota (a politician who is a member of the Northern League Party), who proposed implementing preparatory classes for foreign students (Motion 1/00033, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2008). The second was the Circular Letter of the Ministry of Education Gelmini, which was applied in January 2010 (C.M. 2/2010). The Circular Letter made Italian schools rearrange classes so that foreign students would represent no more than 30% of all students. The motion and the Circular letter provoked arguments among politicians, civil society actors, public opinion leaders and teaching staff.

These proposals are interesting to analyze because they symbolize the current political approach to the issue of foreign students and the pedagogy applied to them. They represent the current

normative approach to the management of cultural and religious diversities within the Italian education system. They also provoke a debate which is representative of how civil society actors reacted to this normative approach. The rapid growth in the number of children of foreign origin within schools obliged teachers to deal with all the issues related to them (i.e. their arrival from abroad during the school year, their lack of knowledge of Italian, their cultural and religious differences, their difficulties in entering a new education system, etc.). When foreign students began to enter the Italian education system, their presence was perceived as problematic, but then teachers tried out various strategies and practices to address the issue and equipped schools for the management of foreign students. The best practices inspired the writing of documents on interculturality, which contained instructions on how to deal with the presence of foreign students in terms of their admission to schools, the way to change the curricula, the training of head-teachers and teachers, the instruments to be used to fight against racism and discrimination, etc. Nevertheless, whereas the education system moved towards an approach that was based on respect for and recognition of foreign students' diversities<sup>37</sup>, the political and normative approach was ambiguous and seemed to be opposed to the intercultural principles. The approach of Cota's motion seems to be based on (minimal) tolerance rather than acceptance or recognition. The concept seemed to be: "there are many foreign students, so we cannot sidestep the problem; we have to accept them and to find the best solution to resolve the problem without damaging Italian children". It is very different from the approach which has characterized the Italian education system until now, i.e. interculturality (in its conception of heterogeneity in the classrooms). In Cota's motion, integration can be achieved by reducing the differences between Italian and foreign students, in terms of academic achievements, language, culture. This can be achieved by implementing preparatory classes for foreign students in which the gap with Italians can be bridged, by verifying their proficiencies through specific tests and assessments, by teaching them Italian laws, customs, values and principles. By contrast, according to the prevailing meaning and interpretation of the intercultural approach, integration can be achieved through cultural exchange and recognition, above all through the evaluation of cultural differences.

So, the different discourses and frames of politicians, the mass media, documents on interculturality and the interviewees allow us to understand how foreign students are perceived by these civil society actors, why/how/by whom they are or are not tolerated or recognised.

Intolerance, tolerance and recognition can be analyzed by focusing on pedagogy and curricula (as in the case of Cota's motion), but also on the structure of the education system. The increasing demands of some minorities to build their own schools (i.e. the Evangelical schools in US) correspond to the need to have educational contexts where cultural values and identities are transmitted, and where recognition can be gained in the public sphere. These needs can be met through the creation of faith schools. In Italy the education system is based mostly on state schools and faith schools founded by minorities do not exist. The only faith schools that exist are Catholic ones and some Jewish ones<sup>38</sup>, and they are formally recognised by the state. The issue of faith schools became the subject of public and political debate when the school in via Quaranta, in Milan, attracted the attention of politicians, the mass media and educational experts. Although the school had existed for many years, it only became a key issue in the public and political arena in 2005. The school was not formally recognised, indeed it was criticized for many reasons. After a lengthy debate and various episodes, the school was obliged to close. Some months later a group of Muslim parents opened another school (the via Ventura school) to guarantee a specific type of education for their children. The examples of the school in via Quaranta and in via Ventura show that the issue of faith schools will grow over the next few years and

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<sup>37</sup> It should be remembered that in recent years it has been difficult to invest resources in organizing initiatives to apply the intercultural approach because of the reductions in funding for state schools.

<sup>38</sup> In Milan there are three Jewish schools but the Jewish community do not define them as faith schools. The schools are formally recognised by the Italian state: they adopt the Italian curricula, they teach the same subjects as state schools, their approach is in line with the Italian Constitution.

will become a disputed topic in the public and political agenda. It will make the Italian education system change because of the cultural and religious pluralism of Italian society in the future.

### **3.3. Methodology and Research Design**

This report is based on desk research and fieldwork. In terms of desk research we collected statistical data, policy documents (e.g. circulars, motions and laws) and journal articles. The fieldwork was conducted between March and May in the metropolitan area of Milan and it was based on qualitative interviews. Finally a discussion group was organized and carried out in June, in order to introduce the results of the first part of the research, to discuss them, to get feedback, input, advice, etc.

More specifically, we conducted 21 semi-structured qualitative interviews in total: 16 on the first case study, 5 on the second case study. For the discussion group 9 people participated: 2 members of trade unions, 2 university professors, 2 school teachers (one is responsible for foreign students, too), 2 members of no-profit organizations and a member of an Islamic association in Milan. They all work on immigration issues and 6 out of 9 work on foreign student issues.

As regards the first case study, we selected some public primary and middle schools where the percentage of foreign children was high. We did not consider the private schools, where foreign children are completely absent or are very few in number. We also used snowballing, asking head teachers and teachers to indicate other schools to us. This technique was useful and easy to apply, because a network of schools has been created in Milan in order to coordinate the actions of managing foreign students. The network was built thanks to a project implemented by the collaboration between the Milan Municipality, the Provincial Education Department, the Regional Education Department, the Foundation Ismu (a no profit organization which carries out research on immigration; it is one of the most important organizations in the Italian context which deal with migration issues) and 4 leader schools. These schools have the task of coordinating and monitoring the actions of the schools which are situated in the same area as the leader schools and which have joined the project<sup>39</sup>. In every school there is at least one linguistic facilitator who teaches in the language laboratories and one person responsible for foreign students<sup>40</sup>. In the 4 leader schools there are 4 people responsible for foreign students who coordinate all those responsible in all the schools within the project.

Of the 16 interviews, 3 were with head-teachers, 3 with deputy head-teachers (of these, 2 are also teachers, 1 was a teacher but now he is a deputy head-teacher), 5 with linguistic facilitators (of these, 1 is also a teacher of religion and 1 is also responsible for foreign students), 3 with teachers (1 is also responsible for foreign children), 1 with a person responsible for foreign students in one of the 4 leader schools. Finally the person responsible for interculturality at the Provincial Education Department was interviewed.

Although it was quite easy to interview head-teachers and teachers, it was more difficult to contact state actors, such as administrative staff, politicians, people who work at the Education Departments. The school staff did not help the researcher to contact either these people or the students' parents, because of the privacy laws regarding the students. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity of the groups was guaranteed by analyzing both the frames of different social actors who work within the schools and those which emerged from the secondary sources analyzed. Indeed, the analysis of

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<sup>39</sup> Almost all the Milan primary and middle schools joined the project.

<sup>40</sup> In many cases the person responsible for foreign students is also the linguistic facilitator. Both the former and the latter can carry out these roles and at the same time work as normal teachers.

different types of secondary sources and of the interviewees who work daily in the schools and usually deal with the diversities, highlighted the discrepancies between what is said by the mass media and politicians, what is written in circulars, laws and documents on interculturality and finally what is said by teachers. These discrepancies were also outlined by people who participated in the discussion group, who stated that one of the most important issues about immigration is the role of the mass media in representing foreign people negatively, in describing events in a twisted way and in spreading fear.

In the second case study the interviewees were conducted with people from different backgrounds and who had had different roles in the key event. 3 out of 5 were Italian, 2 were Egyptian. Among the former, one is a professor, one is an ex head-teacher of the Via Ventura school, one is a representative for an Italian association which helped some people from the Islamic community of via Quaranta to build the via Ventura school and to apply for official recognition as a “foreign school”<sup>41</sup>. Among the latter, one was a teacher from the Via Quaranta school, one is a responsible for the via Ventura school.

In this case the heterogeneity of the interviewees allowed the researchers to analyse different frames about the via Quaranta school and the following events. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention the difficulties in contacting people who were involved in the key event. We think that partly it depends on the fact that the debate and the closure of via Quaranta school happened in 2005-2006, 5-6 years ago. Besides, the events were characterized by deep conflicts within the Islamic community of via Quaranta and the local politicians. There were some demonstrations by the Northern League Party against the school and other demonstrations by Muslim parents in favour of the school, and finally (before the via Ventura school opened) Muslim students suffered, because most stayed at home or went back to Egypt after the closure of via Quaranta school. A sad event is also linked to these facts: during a demonstration, a young boy was accidentally run over by a car. Last but not least, the via Quaranta school was part of the Islamic community of via Jenner, which housed some suspected terrorists who were arrested in 2006. The issue, therefore, became awkward and even now it is a sensitive topic, which can be used politically to attract votes. The second reason why we had difficulties in interviewing people is related to the first. The research was conducted during the months before the administrative elections of the Mayor of Milan in 2011. The local politicians and their administrative staff were busy in the political campaign and stated they had no time to be interviewed, but we suppose that there were political reasons behind these refusals, i.e. wishing to avoid dealing with this awkward issue during the political campaign.

As regards the places where the interviews were conducted, in the first case study they were carried out in the schools, in classrooms or in the head-teachers’ offices. In the second case study the places where the interviews were held were more informal: at the interviewees’ homes, in a cafe, in a park. One was held at the university, one in the interviewee’s office. Finally the discussion group was carried out at the university, in a seminar room.

Both the interviews and the discussion group were conducted in Italian, audio-recorded and then transcribed. The interview guides used for the interviews as well as the list of interviewers and of the people who participated in the discussion group can be found in the appendix to this report. The initials of interviewees are fictional, to maintain their anonymity. Some socio-demographic data (their ethnicity/nationality, gender, their job or role in the key events) are given in the list of interviews at the

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<sup>41</sup> Besides the state schools and the private schools (which could apply to be officially recognized by a specific procedure – see note 2), the Italian law allows all types of schools to be set up. The qualifications which these schools issue do not have the same legal validity as those issued by state schools and recognized private schools. These kinds of schools are mostly foreign schools (i.e. the American school, the Japanese, the English, etc.).

annex of this report. Our analysis of the interview data was based on the tradition of qualitative discourse analysis, from a critical perspective (Wodak et al., 1999, Wodak and Meyer 2001, Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2008).

### 3.4. Case study 1: the preparatory classes

#### 3.4.1. *The motion proposed by the Northern League Party*

In September 2008 the politician Cota, a member of the Northern League Party, proposed a motion<sup>42</sup> to the Chamber of Deputies to address the issue of foreign students in schools. In his long text, Cota described the changes in the Italian education system due to the presence of foreign students and outlined the difficulties of schools in managing their increasing number. The problems mainly concern language learning, because foreign students have to learn Italian before studying other subjects. In Cota's opinion the language programmes slow teaching down because teachers have to teach slowly and pay particular attention to foreign students. Consequently, Italian students suffer: they are behind in curricula because of the presence of foreign students. To resolve the problem, Cota suggested implementing preparatory classes for foreign students, which were called "bridge-classes". The declared aim was to favour both foreign students and Italian students. Indeed within the preparatory classes foreign students could learn the Italian language and they could be educated in the Italian legal and social system, in civics, values and norms. So, foreign students could learn Italian in separate classes and could be socialized into the Italian culture, whereas Italian students would not suffer in their learning programmes. Furthermore, preparatory classes are temporary: after attending them and learning the Italian language, students have to pass an exam to be able to enter mainstream classes. In Cota's statement the final aim was to favour actual integration and to prevent racism<sup>43</sup>.

The motion was discussed by the Chamber of Deputies, creating disagreements also among the centre-right and right politicians. Finally, the motion was approved, changing the name of preparatory classes from "bridge classes" to "induction classes". The motion provoked a wide debate and opposition from the left wing parties, Catholic organizations, and the trade unions. The President of the Republic also intervened to prevent further debate. The motion has not been made law and it has never been implemented.

Two years after the motion, the Minister of Education Maria Stella Gelmini made another proposal to deal with the presence of foreign students in schools. Specifically, the document written by the Minister Gelmini was a Circular letter<sup>44</sup> containing "instructions and recommendations for the integration of foreign students" (C.M. 2/2010). The most important recommendation was to form classes so that no more than 30% of students were foreign. The aim was to facilitate the learning process of all students<sup>45</sup> (as was the aim of the Cota's motion), but also to favour integration and to avoid ghetto-classes. The Circular Letter also generated controversy and disagreement in the public and political debate. It has also been unfeasible in many schools where the percentage of foreign students was 50% or more. Consequently, the Minister was obliged to issue postponements for schools where the number of foreign students was greater than 30%.

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<sup>42</sup> A motion is a proposal which is submitted at the Chamber Assembly (or at the Senate) to be discussed and voted on. Its aim is to influence and give direction to the policy of the government.

<sup>43</sup> The political orientation, the curriculum of Cota and some declarations lead us to think that the aim was different: to protect Italian students from the slowing down of curricula caused by the presence of foreign students in the classes.

<sup>44</sup> See note 8 for a definition of the Circular letter.

<sup>45</sup> The idea is that if there are few foreign students in classes it is easier to teach and fulfil the terms of learning programmes.



### **3.4.2. The findings**

Cota's motion is a document where the reasons for preparatory classes are fully discussed. The subscribers (Cota and other members of The Northern League Party) seem to know the issue of foreign students very well: in the introduction of the motion they report data about foreign students in Italian schools, and they critically analyze the issue. Secondly, they explain the reasons for their proposal: because of the large number of foreign students in Italian schools it is necessary to address differences between Italian children and children with different linguistic and cultural traits. The preparatory classes, called "bridge-classes", are temporary: when students learn Italian and pass the language test, they will enter mainstream classes. The declared aim of this proposal is to prevent foreign students from entering mainstream classes without knowing the Italian language and without being prepared to adapt to Italian society and culture. The motion suggests a "policy of positive and temporary discrimination"<sup>46</sup>, to favour immigrant children and to reduce the risk of their being excluded. Besides language tests and bridge classes, the motion also suggests distributing foreign students in the mainstream classes evenly, "to favour the whole integration and to avoid the risk of classes made up of foreign students only". The motion proposes a new way of pedagogically addressing diversity and of achieving integration: it happens when foreign students reach the same education level as Italian students (therefore when they learn the Italian language, adapt to the school rules and when learning programmes are carried out easily), without creating obstacles to the learning of Italians.

So, the contents of the proposal are apparently anti-racist and aimed at favouring integration. Nevertheless, other politicians and civil society actors point out that the aim of the proposal is actually discriminatory. They claim that the actual aim is to favour the learning on the part of Italian pupils by excluding those students who might slow down delivery of the syllabus.

The motion caused a debate: firstly the Centre Parties and secondly the Centre-left Parties wrote other motions. The former wanted to outline the importance of having permanent classes only - called "open classes" - "enriching the curricula with topics which refer to the cultural varieties". The final aim is "the appreciation of pluralism, diversity and dialogue", by the adoption of an intercultural approach (Motion 1/00049, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2008). The Centre-left parties wrote two documents in which they outlined the universalism of the Italian education system, which has to be applied to foreign students too. They quote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and they remind us of the values and principles of the Italian model of integration in schools: it is a model based on intercultural education, which recognizes the importance of learning Italian in order to be integrated and to communicate both inside and outside school. They point out that learning programs for foreign students have to be part of the whole learning process: foreign students attend separate classes for part of the school day and for a brief period. In their opinion the best way to achieve integration is "to favour the meeting among students of different nationalities", because it speeds up the learning process and the removal of cultural and linguistic barriers (Motion n. 1/00050, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2008, and Motion n. 1/00051, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2008).

The motion caused a debate among politicians, but also among other social actors (scientists, no-profit organizations, trade unions, etc.) who pronounced their opinion about the "induction classes". Some national organizations of experts of linguistics (the Italian Society of Glottology, the Society of Italian linguistics, the Italian Association of applied linguistics, the Group of Intervention and Study on linguistic education) criticized Cota's proposal in its method: the learning process of a new language is facilitated when students are "immersed in the new cultural and linguistic context"

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<sup>46</sup> Probably the Northern League Party tried to hide a different aim behind political correctness: to exclude migrant children from the mainstream classes.

and not when they are isolated (la Repubblica, 20.11.2008). Trade Unions accused the Northern League of “racial intolerance” and evoked “the ghost of apartheid”; the influential Catholic journal “Famiglia Cristiana” (Christian Family), the most important journal in the Catholic community, declared that the motion favours the birth of “continuous events of intolerance, violence and racism” (la Repubblica 15.10. 2008). The Association of Italian Municipalities (Anci) stated that the proposal was an act of discrimination, whereas the aim should have been to guarantee integration and equal opportunities (*ibid.*). There were also many criticisms from politicians, not only from the left wing parties but also from the right wing parties. For example the politicians Cristaldi and Pepe (right wing party members) strongly criticized the motion, stating that “integration happens if there is mutual respect and friendship among people, not because of a law” (Il Sole24ore 15.10.2008). The Mayor of Rome, Alemanno (member of Centre Right Party Pdl), was also puzzled by the motion, saying that it was necessary to take a break to think about and to discuss the matter with the no-profit and voluntary organizations which support schools in their activities (la Stampa 16.10.2008). Even Alessandra Mussolini (the granddaughter of Benito Mussolini) defined the proposal as a “racist measure” (*ibid.*).

Generally, the supporters of “bridge classes” said that they are necessary to address the issue of foreign students in schools. Cota, for example, sustained that “they guarantee equal opportunities to all students” because they help foreign students to learn Italian and to fill the gap between them and Italian students. He said the motion’s aim is only “to face the problem of teaching foreign children in our schools”, without any prejudice (Il Sole24ore, 15.10.2008). The framework is that of “integration”, although the Northern League’s approach has always been that of being against foreign people and immigration.

On the other side of the debate, the opponents to the motion said “bridge-classes” favour discrimination and that they are ghetto-classes. The centre-left politician Fassino for example claimed that the motion “represents a cultural regression”, “it is a contemptible proposal, which introduces discrimination at school” (Corriere della Sera, 15.10.2008).

Although the Cota’s motion was approved by the Chamber of Deputies, it did not become law and was not applied. However, two years later the Minister of Education Gelmini issued the Circular Letter about 30% of foreign students (C.M. 2/2010) and the Northern League Party expressed its satisfaction, stating that “the introduction of a limit to the number of foreign students in classes would be a great result” (in FLC CGIL, 24.03.2009). The Circular Letter had the same aim as Cota’s motion apparently: to favour integration of foreign students, to avoid their concentration in some schools or classes and therefore the slowing down of learning programs.

Although the Northern League Party’s declared aim was the integration of foreign students and the removal of the gap between them and Italian students, the motion was perceived negatively by teachers and head teachers.

Through the interviews carried out it emerges that under the declared aim of the motion (i.e. integration) a different aim was hidden: exclusion. RS, a linguistic facilitator in a primary school, says:

RS: The reason for bridge-classes was the xenophobia of the Northern League Party. I think that there were no other reasons; the only reason was to create ghettos. They did not want to create integration but exclusion. I’m quite sure about this.

I: The Northern League politicians said that the bridge-classes were an instrument to foster inclusion in mainstream classes...

RS: Yes, but I think they are inapplicable, especially for children. It could make sense for a young man, a man aged 20 years old, or for an adult, because they are already grown up, but for children....children should stay with children, they should mix with children of other ethnicities (Int. 7, RS, linguistic facilitator).

Like RS, most interviewees say that to foster integration it is important to let children stay together. The relationship between foreign children and Italian children helps them to learn the Italian language and to familiarize themselves with new rules and ways of socializing:

I: Do you think that bridge-classes might be a solution for the integration of immigrant children?

SM: We believe more in another solution...helping them to fit in should definitely be done in mainstream classes, in their class, where they were put. Naturally they do not have the instruments to understand Italian, they do not know Italian, so we have thought about an intensive laboratory, but not a bridge-class. They stay in mainstream classes in the morning, when they arrive at school, they do all the subjects they can do, i.e. gym, music, arts, games together. At 10.30 a.m. they have their morning break together with their classmates, it is a choice we have made. They have the break together, they go to the canteen together, so that they become integrated as much as possible, because play is what helps them fit in as much as possible...but, anyway, we believe that work in the laboratory could be done, intensively, for an hour. Then fitting them into the class should be done, we believe more in this (Int. 9, SM, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher).

Most interviewees work in schools where there are separate classes - called "language laboratories" - where students can learn Italian and socialize within the Italian education and social system. But these separate classes are very different from the bridge-classes proposed by Cota for two reasons. Firstly, they are attended only by foreign students who have been in Italy for 2 years or less. Secondly, they are temporary and they are attended for specific and brief periods of the school year. All the teachers and head-teachers interviewed believe that language-laboratories are very efficient because they support mainstream classes without isolating or excluding foreign students. Language laboratories and mainstream classes work in parallel and contribute to both the integration and the education of students.

Integration, therefore, can be achieved when students stay together and share everyday life at school. Through their relationships with their peers they can keep in touch with those who are different, they can mix and interact, they learn that differences are positive. Teachers try to teach this value, which is a fundamental principle of the Italian education system (as we illustrated in the introduction), by modifying and enriching the curricula with new contents:

FC: In the fifth year of primary school we dedicate 40% of the geography lessons to talking about the countries where the children in the class come from. It is the right thing to do, I think

I: Did the school choose to do this?

FC: Yes, some projects are thought up and then carried out. So in history, in geography, in the new curricula...when we teach them about ancient times, i.e. ancient China, we also talk about Buddha, about Buddhism. So, if there are Thai children in the class, or children from those countries, they are involved too. Secondly, we talk about Islam, because when we speak about the birth of Christianity there is also the birth of Islam. So, we can involve almost all the children. We have found a *modus operandi*. In Italian lessons, we also look for stories, folk tales and myths about the countries of origin of the students...the children say "yes, I remember this, yes! Someone told me this!" (Int. 11, FC, teacher).

To enrich the curricula and to encourage the exchange of information and knowledge, teachers try to involve foreign children. By telling them something related to their countries of origin or culture teachers put students' differences in a positive light and let other students know about them. Religion is a topic that is well-suited to this purpose:

SM: In the fifth year we talk about all the religions of the world...the five main religions, the religious education teachers have done a project, with the authorization of parents, to let all the children attend this ...this path, this process of knowledge about the other religions. And this is very nice because children interact with the teacher. When a teacher is explaining Islam to students, children help the teacher to explain. They interact with the teacher. And in this way they do not feel different from others. "You are of this faith so you could tell us why you have some of these customs"...it is very interesting work (Int. 9, SM, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher).

The interviewees recognised that it is not always easy to change curricula due to the presence of foreign students, especially because an intercultural approach is not applicable to some subjects, such as maths, chemistry, etc. Because it is sometimes difficult to change curricula and to outline the links between cultures, teachers also use other strategies to let students know about each other's cultures of origin. Festivities are usually used for this purpose: all students celebrate not only the Italian festivities but also the festivities of foreign students. The strategies used to do this change over the years, based on the characteristics of the school population and on the successful practices done previously:

CB: We organize the school Christmas party in various ways, based on the different situations. Generally we compare the festivities of the various countries. For example last year we organized a joint celebration where we intentionally highlighted typical festivities...not so much of the countries but of the social and religious orientations of those countries. We spoke about social orientation, so the Jewish Saturday has been explained, the Arab festivity has been explained, our Christmas has been explained, the Italian New Year's Day, that is shared. This work has been done, because we Italian...but we...Christmas...I really insist on this because I want to let students understand that we consider religion as a process not of catechism, but of social culture. Italy is a country that does not forget 2000 years of Christianity, not because it was the site of the Pontificate but because Christianity is part of daily life. This year we have done some work on Mother Teresa of Calcutta and we gave to students a pencil<sup>47</sup>, a picture of Mother Teresa and a prayer about humanity. We were undecided about giving them the pencil: "Do we give them it or not?" But it was very much appreciated, because we depicted her as an historical figure, as a social figure. We will consider other historical people, i.e. San Francesco who is also recognised by the Islamic culture, other historical figures are respected by both the cultures. They do not deny the existence of Jesus Christ, we have to be clear about that. We definitely have to be careful not to create any clashes. (Int. 5, CB, head-teacher).

Even when foreign festivities are not celebrated or shared (for example because the number of students of a certain nationality/origin is small), they are respected. A case in point is the end of Ramadan or the period when Arab students have to do exams at their Consulate to obtain a foreign

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<sup>47</sup> The head-teacher explained that Mother Teresa defined herself as "the pencil of God", and for this reason he decided to give a pencil to all students.

education qualification<sup>48</sup>: on these occasions foreign students do not go to school for a few days, but teachers know that and they do not tell the students off. Their absence is justified in some way. By contrast, when students come back to school, teachers sometimes ask them to tell other students how they have celebrated their festivities.

Besides the fact that all festivities are celebrated or described to other students to explain and share them, Catholic festivities are often celebrated without giving them a religious significance, but rather outlining the universal values they are connected with or emphasizing their historical significance:

TE: Our school has many students of different religions, but it respects the religious festivity of Christmas, we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate it because we are Italians, but we give a more general connotation to it, we outline not only the birth of Jesus Christ but also the values of peace and brotherhood. There are all the families at the Christmas celebration, all the families come and eat traditional Italian food with us quite happily. Nothing has ever happened, they respect us as we respect the fact that they do Ramadan (Int. 10, TE, linguistic facilitator and responsible for foreign students).

Although the teachers believe it is important to emphasize universal values more than the religious significance of festivities, they also outline the fact that it is necessary to celebrate them and not to forget them. In fact they are part of the Italian tradition and culture, of the Italian cultural heritage and they are essential to understanding Italian society:

DA: From my point of view, it does not make sense to abolish our festivities. I know that some people think “don’t celebrate Christmas because it could offend the Muslims”. I think...it is part of our tradition, of our culture...if we were in a Jewish country there would be “the Feast of Tabernacles”, or the end of the Ramadan and we would be part of that world. We should find a way to celebrate festivities which is not annoying or offensive (Int. 2, DA, linguistic facilitator).

In the interviews it appears that teachers and head-teachers are very open-minded and willing to appreciate cultural and religious differences. In Italian schools every student can choose his/her diet, Muslim girls can wear the headscarf, and the festivities of foreign students are celebrated. But in some teachers’ opinions the possibility for foreign students to appreciate their culture and to practise their traditions should only be allowed to a certain extent.

For example an interviewee said that making children fast during Ramadan is a violation of their rights and it should not be allowed:

RS: As regards Ramadan I would be not tolerant, because in my opinion the right of the child is damaged. Firstly, the Koran says that until 14 years old, until there is a conscious choice, fasting is not compulsory. So, I think I would tell the family to look for another school, because I think that I would be severe about that. I would not allow a child to remain at school from the morning to the evening without eating and drinking. I would have a problem with that, but it has never happened to me.

I: Some schools have opted for letting the children go home at lunchtime...

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<sup>48</sup> The custom of making children obtain an educational qualification from the country of origin is common among Egyptian families.

RS: Yes, perhaps they have. But it is also true that children stay at school until 12 a.m., 12.30 a.m. and then they go home. Then they come back at 2 p.m. but I know that the child has not been drinking since the morning...there might also be some problems, health problems (Int. 7, RS, linguistic facilitator).

In RS's opinion some cultural demands could be satisfied at school, but only to a certain extent: she would allow children to wear the headscarf but she would not allow headscarves which cover the face, she would ban fasting before the age of 14.

Others state that they accept some cultural practices (i.e. the fast during Ramadan) but do not allow other practices (i.e. prayers during the school time), apart from specific reasons or for a limited period of time:

CC: There was only one case of a Muslim family which sent the children to school in headscarves...but it was a special situation because these two girls came here after the closure of via Quaranta school, in a period of transition while they were waiting for via Ventura school to open. They enrolled and they asked if they could come to school in their headscarves, to go home during Ramadan when the other children had lunch, and to pray at 1 p.m. in a classroom we set aside for them. I let them do this in a period of transition, because I knew it was a transition period. But this fact caused unrest among teachers and parents, they began to say: "But if they have decided to come here, to a state school, they have to adapt to the school's rules, so we do not understand why they can wear a headscarf, they can pray at 1 p.m....". There were also people who were more open-minded, who tolerated the situation.

I: Anyway, her behaviour was...

CC: I said "Let's make things easy..." I do not want to bang my head against the wall. I know that in other schools the head-teacher said: "No, if children come here, they have to accept, to accept that they have to pray at other times"; whereas I know that the exemption from lunch is very common (Int.1, CC, head teacher).

Finally, others forbid some practices because of the school's values and orientation, which are based on the equality of all students:

TE: The child should do Ramadan, well, we respect that...The only thing that we never allow is prayer, but we don't allow anybody to do this. They asked us to put a carpet down and pray. We told them that we have neither the space nor the staff to manage it. Absolutely, nor can Catholics, who have a Convention with the Church to teach the Catholic religion, which I am contrary to, because I think that every religion should be practised privately. The parents did not oppose this and said ok. In this school diversity is experienced through mutual respect (Int. 10, TE, linguistic facilitator and responsible for foreign students).

Consequently, children can carry out some cultural customs but not others: they can practice the traditions that do not undermine the characteristics of the Italian school and that do not influence its organization (i.e. the arrangement of time or spaces); by contrast, they do not practice those traditions that would make the school change its approach: that of protecting and guaranteeing the demands of minority groups in spite of its universalistic values (that are based on equality among all students). For example the fast during Ramadan does not affect the organization of the school and most interviewees agreed that it has to be respected because it is a child's right; also the children's

absence during their festivities is allowed because children have the right to celebrate them and it does not affect the class's routine. But the request to pray during school time is seen as something involving a minority which also requires the school to reorganize its timetable and space: if prayer was permitted for a minority, it would have to be permitted to all the minorities for equality's sake.

Another reason why certain cultural practices are not allowed or are opposed by teachers is the need to protect the children's rights and their education. The common frame of reference is "the right of the child": in the teachers' opinion if this right is not respected, they have the duty to make it be respected.

Therefore the difficulties in managing cultural and religious differences and in listening to immigrants' demands arise when, in the teachers' opinion, these demands influence and affect children's rights, their education or their well-being. Teachers believe that the demands of parents sometimes negatively influence children, who cannot go through their school life happily because of their parents' wishes and rules. These wishes are culturally founded, such as the restrictions regarding girls, which are typical (from the teachers' point of view) of Muslim families:

SM: The swimming pool for girls could not be...it is not really accepted. We got a definite no for this girl, who took it all very badly...very badly, doing very bad things, terrible things against her classmates, because of this anger she had inside her. On that occasion we were facing a brick wall.

I: Was it a single case or were there many cases?

SM: There are not many cases. But for example make up for...make up for a Halloween party: the children made hats and cloaks, and my colleague put make up on them, some had moustaches, someone dressed up as a cat, etc. It was a disaster, because this thing was inadmissible.

I: Was it inadmissible to put makeup on the girl?

SM: Yes, the girl couldn't. Absolutely not. Terrible suffering for this girl who was very happy to do it. And the father came to school saying "never again! It should never happen again because this is going too far". And my colleague: "I did not think I could not! The girl had accepted..." Cases like this are few and far between, there aren't many but there are a few. And the experience teaches us, because now the teacher tries to be more careful, if there is a party she does not put makeup on the girl. In the end the people who are affected are the children, they are the children (Int. 9, SM, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher).

When possible, teachers do not directly address parents' demands, but rather they try to bypass the issue, as in this case:

FC: This boy did not eat during Ramadan. It happened that I pasted some pictures of Jesus Christ on his exercise book. He told me that he could neither look at these images nor touch them: "I won't do it, because I can't!"....really fundamentalist.

I: So, what happened?

FC: Nothing, because I had other pictures for the same purpose.

I: And what was the purpose?

FC: The purpose was to teach the soft "g" sound. I had other pictures, so...but when there are fundamentalist Muslims, especially in fifth year, boys usually –girls less – boys usually do Ramadan (Int. 11, FC, teacher).

Managing of cultural diversity in school is done by teachers trying to mediate, to arrange solutions that do not damage the children's well-being and rights. Inside the classroom teachers can smooth out any difficulties arising from children's cultural differences (by changing curricula, by sharing children's cultural traits and festivities with all the students, etc.). By contrast, there are some problems in their direct relations with parents. The difficulties of interacting with parents often depend on the parents' attitudes towards teachers. For example some problems arise between Muslim fathers and women teachers:

TE: If a boy treats me badly, because he is a Muslim boy, I tell off him, I speak with his father and I tell him: "if you behave with your wife and with your children in this way, ok, but...I am an Italian woman, I am the teacher and so, if you decide to send your boy to school, you should do what I say. Muslim men are quite snobbish but personally I don't give a damn about their snobbishness. They should get over it. I tell him: "If you do things differently at your house, well ok. But here, that's the way it is. If you don't like it, tough" (Int. 10, TE, linguistic facilitator and responsible for foreign students).

Another type of problem regards the parents' concept of teaching and training children. Some families ask teachers to adopt a severe educational style, which is considered normal within both families and school. Nevertheless, teachers do not approve of this type of educational style and in their opinion it is sometimes taken to such extremes that it requires school involvement:

CB: The Arab educational style is very strict. I had to intervene in some cases because families are...let's say...aggressive. So in this case we intervene to remind them that we are in Italy, that, here, Italian law is in force...which does not accept children being beaten. But, I have to say, they are extreme cases. Generally, behaviour...especially the Arabs quickly acquire the Western mentality, contrary to what people think (Int. 5, CB, head-teacher).

Apart from these cases, which are few and far between in teachers' opinion, the difficulties of interacting with parents regard the concept that parents and teachers have about the school, about the attitude to school and its rules, about the relation between families and school. These differences sometimes produce misunderstandings, so that some schools have decided to employ cultural mediators to resolve the issue. As a teacher says:

SM: We tried to ask for the support of some cultural mediators, there are some NGOs that collaborate with the school, because we realized that for some people being at school, the culture, the mentality of the school is completely different from our perspective. For example Arab mothers tell me: "Beat him! Beat him if he does not listen to you!" This is a thing...it is impossible for me, really, I have never thought about it for many years! For them it is very normal, as it is normal to give boys very few rules. So we tried to get support from these cultural mediators, so that they could explain our way of seeing school to them and they explained what the problems were to us. We maybe fight desperately for something for the children's sake, whereas at home parents talk to them in a completely different way. The cultural mediator is important because he/she helps them to adopt a different point of view, to understand the meaning of some behaviour. There was a Peruvian mother who never came to a parents' evening to talk with me about her son, she never came. But later we found out that for her it was normal, she entrusted her son completely to us, she entrusted her son's education to



us, even though we needed to work with her. The mediator explained this to us and explained to her that we needed her collaboration (Int. 9, SM, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher).

In the interviewees' opinion, in order to resolve misunderstandings it is important to talk with families, to interact and try to understand each other's points of view. Through positive relationship, based on openness and dialogue, people can recognise cultural differences and can mediate.

### **3.4.3. Conclusion**

Cota's motion has never been applied but it highlights a specific approach towards the integration of foreign students and the management of their cultural diversities. The bridge-classes are useful because by attending them foreign students can learn Italian and be spared from being suddenly put into mainstream classes. The classes allow them to fill their Italian language gap and get ready to enter the mainstream classes. Integration is achieved when foreign students learn the Italian language and culture.

By contrast, the opponents to the scheme claim that the aim of bridge-classes is to isolate foreign students, to create ghettos and to discriminate against them. Among the opponents, the teachers and head-teachers interviewed explain the reasons for their opposing the motion based on pedagogical and educational grounds. The protective approach of the motion (firstly towards foreign students, who could fill the Italian language gap through bridge-classes; secondly towards Italians, who could carry on with the learning programmes in mainstream classes without slowing down because of foreign students) actually results in separation and exclusion. By contrast, integration could be achieved through two strategies: firstly letting Italian and foreign students be together; secondly, letting them get to know each others' differences and recognise them.

Because Cota's motion on preparatory classes has never become law and because teachers considered it a completely inappropriate proposal from a pedagogical point of view, they discussed the issue very briefly in the interviews. But, since its aim was to propose a way of managing diversities in schools, it was the starting point for discussions with the interviewees about other ways of managing diversities. The focus of interviews, therefore, moved inevitably from Cota's motion to the actions or proposals of teachers as an alternative to the motion to deal with the cultural and ethnic diversities of students.

The approach to managing the cultural and religious diversities that in the interviewees' opinion is adopted (and has to be adopted) within schools is that of recognition, not of toleration. They think that toleration is an inappropriate approach because it implies that some people tolerate and put up with others, although they do not like them. They do not like the term "toleration" and they refuse to use it because it implies that the tolerator has the power to tolerate or not, he/she can consciously refrain from interference or exercise his/her power (Preston King 1976, McKinnon 2006, 14 in WP2). The term "toleration", therefore, highlights the existence of an unequal treatment. By contrast, recognition is the right approach to fostering relations and integration. Recognition means both accepting and appreciating the diversities: through acceptance and mutual recognition people can interact, keep in touch, and get to know each another. So, the management of diversities in school is based on recognition and exchange between people, not on toleration which, by contrast, implies a negative attitude towards the differences.

Nevertheless, the interviewees' statements are sometimes in contrast with the behaviour they adopt in some situations which they told us about. On the one hand they state that respect and recognition are the most important values that have to guide teachers in managing diversities, on the

other hand they have difficulty in positively accepting some kinds of cultural or religious claims by minorities. Specifically they do not accept those demands that undermine the universalistic approach of the Italian school system or that damage children's rights or well-being. To satisfy the demands of some minorities (i.e. praying during school time) is to recognise them and not others, to treat them better than others and not to respect the universalistic values of the Italian education system whereby every student is the same. Other claims are not accepted positively because they come from foreign children's parents who do not think that their demands can damage children's well being or rights. For example their refusal to allow their daughters to go to the swimming pool is criticised because the girls feel different from their peers and they suffer because of their parents' demands. In the same way overly severe or aggressive education styles are not accepted because they damage children's rights. But in the first case teachers try to find a compromise with parents and try to reconcile their demands with the education programmes of the school, or they try to persuade them to do the best thing for their children, even though it might be against their cultural demands. If teachers cannot mediate, they accept the parents' claims: the attitude is that of minimal toleration and foreign parents' claims are grudgingly accepted. As Walzer would say, there is, on the part of teachers a "resigned acceptance of differences for the sake of peace" (1997). Teachers try to find a balance between the two components of toleration, objection and acceptance (King, 1976, 44-54). To do this they suspend and ignore some considerations because of the fact that their attention has shifted "from the object of disapproval to the humanity or the moral standing of the subjects before them" (Heyd 1996, 12). By contrast, in the second case, because children's rights are damaged, the normal reaction is that of intolerance. Toleration cannot be applied because the parents' claims harm children, who are protected by rights (McKinnon 1996, ch.5).

In summary, teachers and head-teachers have learned the intercultural approach, based on recognition, and they use it on some school life occasions, i.e. the festivities. But, like an expert in interculturality said in the discussion group (SC, responsible for interculturality), it is used especially in the vocabulary of teachers, and it is interiorized at a theoretical level, whereas in many everyday situations they cannot act by referring to recognition but only to (minimal) toleration. In the opinion of some participants in the discussion group (SC, responsible for interculturality; DV, responsible for immigrant office) the intercultural approach has not yet been interiorized at all by teachers, who swing along a continuum, from resignation to enthusiasm (Walzer, 1997), or from permission to esteem (Forst, 2003, 42-48) in their education style. Some participants in the discussion groups propose implementing permanent training for teachers, to teach them not only the contents but also the education style of the intercultural approach, based on respect and recognition.

To do this it is necessary to invest resources in order to deconstruct stereotypes, to teach teachers to interpret foreign children's behaviour based not only on cultural explanations. The support of cultural mediators or peripatetic teachers can be useful. Although they already work in collaboration with schools, in recent years their employment has been reduced because of the lack of funding. By contrast, their work could be useful in supporting teachers and in helping some of them to deconstruct their stereotypes. Indeed it is important to abandon an ethnocentric approach when explaining and justifying children's behaviour, but also when teaching them. Despite the fact that the Ministry of Education gives instructions on how to draw up curricula and teachers consider them in their daily school life, their approach continues to be ethnocentric: they continue to enhance Italian traditions and to use textbooks which have a Western European point of view. As one participant in the discussion group states (MC, academic), it is not only the teachers' fault, but also the teaching materials have not yet been created to support teachers in managing the diversities of students. The management of diversity can not be done effectively simply by enhancing and recognising students' differences.. It is also important to teach universal values and to outline their importance. Universal values represent a shared basis and they can be the starting point for teaching children that every human being has to be respected and valued.

The enhancement of cultural and religious differences can only be achieved within mainstream classes and through mutual recognition and exchange. For this reason Cota's motion has been

considered completely inappropriate and far removed from intercultural education. Teachers have been pleased that the motion has remained inapplicable and has not become law, and they state that the language laboratories are effective in helping foreign students to fill the education gap between them and Italians. Secondly, because they are temporary and are attended at specific times during the school day, they allow students to stay together and they avoid the formation of ghetto-classes. Third, the research highlights that the academic achievements of students improve when they are in a heterogeneous context whereas they deteriorate when they are in a homogeneous context. The school mix makes teachers plan heterogeneous lessons and forces them not to concentrate their expectations only on the good students. Finally, the heterogeneity of people positively influences identities. The school mix, therefore, is desirable and necessary. Although schools try to achieve this, it is not always easy, for many reasons, such as the urban and socio-economic characteristics of the catchment areas or the excessive autonomy<sup>49</sup> of the schools. In order to avoid the formation of ghetto schools and classes, therefore, it is necessary to support the schools: families enrol their children in the school nearest their homes. The socio-economic characteristics of the families who live in the neighbourhood therefore influence the composition of the school population. To prevent schools situated on the outskirts of the city becoming ghetto schools it is necessary to formulate local territory development plans in collaboration with all relevant parties, including the local municipality, to jointly address the problem of immigrant populations becoming concentrated in only certain areas. These plans have to be formulated by local networks, which include the schools, no-profit organizations, the local organizations which organize leisure time activities, and the Municipality. This network can work towards avoiding creating areas densely populated by immigrants and can support the schools, whose autonomy is partly criticized because it allows head-teachers broad power in terms of the enrolment of students.

Finally the documents which have been written about interculturality should be distributed and implemented practically. These documents are produced from above, usually by a team of experts, and the contents are liberal and advanced, therefore they can be easily shared. Nevertheless, they are not applied everywhere and in the same way, or sometimes they are not well known. This is a typical approach of the Italian education system: educationalists work a lot on principles and values, and they write excellent documents; but they devote less effort to how the documents can be implemented, how to distribute them, make them known to teachers and actually put into practice. There is a gap between the ideal and theoretical level on one the hand, the practical and real level on the other hand.

There is a lack of training for teachers on how to implement these documents, there are no practical instructions, the fundings are insufficient and there is no actual support and involvement at a political level. A clear example of this discrepancy between the ideal and the real is the document "The Italian strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origin". The document was written in 2007 by a team of experts in education and interculturality<sup>50</sup>. This was the first time that the Italian education system had worked on writing a document which pinpointed an "Italian model of intercultural integration". The document described the principles of the model (universalism, the centrality of human beings, interculturality) and the actions needed to implement it. These actions are described in detail and practical instructions are given on the enrolment of foreign students, the learning of Italian, the appreciation of foreign languages, the relationships with the families, how to fight against the racism and discrimination, the review of the curricula, the training of head-teachers and teachers (but also of the administrative staff which work within the schools) in managing the cultural diversities of students, without falling into the trap of excessive universalism (which leads to an excessive homogenization) or of excessive relativism (which emphasises the diversities in an extreme way). The document is considered as the main guide for education staff. As some participants in the discussion group outlined, it is a sort of handbook which has to be considered

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<sup>49</sup> The autonomy of schools was introduced by the Berlinguer's reform (see the Introduction).

<sup>50</sup> See the introduction for more information on this document.

and kept in mind in everyday school situations. Nevertheless, this document (like all documents on interculturality) is not sufficiently well-known and teachers do not know how to implement it practically. Except from some courses for teachers on interculturality and on teaching Italian to foreign students within language courses (which are organized locally and only for some groups, i.e. in Milan), generally there are no specific teacher training courses which cover practical situations and diversity management in schools. Consequently, teachers act autonomously, based on their own experiences and on the specific situations they have to deal with.

In conclusion, the training for permanent teachers on interculturality, the support of training aids, the development plans of the local territory - which should involve the schools, the no profit organizations, the Municipality, etc. – and finally specific instructions on how to manage the cultural and religious diversities, all emerged as key points to be taken into account in order to improve the management of diversities within Italian schools.

### **3.4. Case study 2: the Egyptian school**

#### ***3.5.1. The debate around the Egyptian school of Milan and its closure***

The school of via Quaranta was founded in the '90s by an Islamic community living in Milan in order to teach the Arabic language and culture to foreign children who were living in Italy. The Islamic families were mostly Egyptian and they wanted their children to learn Arabic, study Egyptian education programmes and obtain the Egyptian education qualification<sup>51</sup>. The aim was to prepare children to go back to Egypt.

The school had been open for 15 years, but in 2000 it began to attract the attention of the Municipality, politicians, education experts and academics. The school was not formally recognised by the institutions. It was located in a building that did not meet building standards and there were also education issues: students only studied Arabic and Egyptian programmes, without learning Italian or being integrated in the Italian context. If they did not return to Egypt they would have to enter Italian secondary schools (the via Quaranta school was only a primary school and a middle school) without knowing Italian<sup>52</sup>. All these problems attracted the attention of the institutions and the school became the subject of intense public and political debate. In the meantime some Italian organizations tried to help the Islamic community and the school: the Catholic University of Milan organized courses for foreign students to teach them Italian in their free time. The courses were held in some Italian schools, to put foreign students in touch with Italian school contexts. Students were also helped to study for exams to get qualifications. But these interventions were stopped because of the public and political debate that arose around the school, the lack of funding, and disagreement among the civil society actors involved in the issue.

In 2005 the Milan Municipality decided to close the school, because of the inadequacy of the building and the lack of hygiene. Although the Muslim families protested publically, the school closed and the children had to go to state schools. Some of them were sent to their countries of origin by their parents, others stayed at home and did not attend school at all. After the closure of via Quaranta school, an Italian no profit association, the “Associazione Insieme” (Association Together) in collaboration with some of those responsible for the via Quaranta school, tried to open another school

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<sup>51</sup> The Egyptian educational qualification can be obtained by taking exams at the end of every school year at the Egyptian Consulate in Italy.

<sup>52</sup> This is what happened to many children: they have never gone back to Egypt but they have gone to Italian schools or the via Ventura school.

in via Ventura, on the outskirts of Milan, in December 2005<sup>53</sup>. The aim was to build a school where there were Italian and Egyptian programmes, where students could learn Italian and Arabic, where the teachers were qualified to teach. The aim was to obtain official recognition as a “foreign school”. But the new school, called Naghib Mahfuz School, encountered many difficulties in opening: there were bureaucratic problems (i.e. the permit to use the spaces for educational purposes or the official certification stating that the building could be used) and the process for obtaining the permit was lengthy. In 2006 it started its activities. In January 2011 it was transferred to another building, where there is still an Italian state school too. The interesting thing to note is that this state school has been at the centre of debate for the last few years because its students are mostly foreign students.

### **3.5.2. The findings**

The school in via Quaranta had been at the centre of political and public debates for a long time, until its closure. After the closure, the debate moved over to the via Ventura school, but within a few months the issue was put aside and forgotten. The event and the debate around it are very important because they highlight an issue which will very probably become a controversial topic in the Italian political and public agenda, i.e. the issue about private foreign and faith schools, and about cultural and religious pluralism.

Coming back to the event, the discussions about the school focused on many different aspects. The Milan Municipality focused on the inadequacy of the building and the lack of hygienic conditions and it justified the school’s closure based on these grounds.

But other civil society actors claimed that the closure was based on issues of integration. Some academics and experts in pedagogy and education (i.e. experts who worked at the Catholic University of Milan) supported a gradual move of Muslim children from the via Quaranta school to Italian state schools. Because the most important thing was the education and the integration of children, in their opinion it was necessary to put them in Italian schools. Through experimental classes and programmes, these experts wanted to teach children using Italian school programmes, without excluding the study of Arabic. In short, they thought that children had to be bilingual, to maintain their origins but also to be integrated into Italian schools and society.

Among politicians, opinions were varied. The centre-right parties wanted the closure of via Quaranta school because in their opinion the best route to integration was to attend Italian state schools. A more extreme approach was that of the Northern League Party which talked about legality and integration: firstly, the school was illegal because it did not observe basic hygiene conditions, so it was necessary “to re-establish legality” (as the Northern League’s Davide Boni said, in *Corriere della Sera*, 22.09.2005); secondly, integration was possible only by sending foreign children to Italian schools. Significantly the Northern League leader at the City Council Matteo Salvini declared: “The law is the law. It has to be applied to Italians. It has to be applied to Muslims. There are many schools where Egyptian children can study. Obviously, their parents do not want their children to become integrated” (in *Corriere della Sera*, 10.09.2006). It is an interesting declaration, which mixes the discourse on legality with the discourse on integration, and which confuses Muslims with Egyptians.

Among centre-left politicians the views were quite different. Some agreed with the closure of the school, declaring similar reasons to those of the centre-right. For example the Province’s Chairman Penati said that “the need to achieve integration is right, but it has to be achieved through state schools and not through private schools which actually encourage separation. The via Quaranta school has to

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<sup>53</sup> In 2005 the school opened as an after-school centre but it obtained the recognition of “foreign school” only in November 2006 (for a definition of “foreign school” see note 23).

be closed because it favours exclusion and not integration” (in *la Repubblica*, 08.09.2005). By contrast, others defend the right of families to choose how and where to teach children.

Among people of foreign origin there were also some who were opposed to the *via Quaranta* school. The most critical was Magdi Allam, an Italian citizen of Egyptian origin, who heavily criticized the school. He wrote critical articles in Italian newspapers, accusing the school of being extremist and describing the children as “excluded and disadvantaged because of preacher-teachers”. He called the school a *Madrasah* and warned the Italian State not to grant the Muslim minority permission to build Islamic schools and Mosques because “national security would be undermined” (in *Corriere della Sera*, 30.08.2005).

The term *Madrasah* was often used by the mass media to speak about the school. Although the representative of the school pointed out that the aim was not to teach Islam but to teach Arabic and to maintain the link with the culture of origin in order to be able to go back home in the future, the mass media always talked about “the Islamic school” or “the Koranic school”, stressing the orientation towards religion.

In the opinion of the interviewees, this common frame is completely wrong. Both those who defended the aims of the school and those who proposed better solutions for the children agree that the school was not a religious school or a fundamentalist school. YG, an Egyptian teacher who taught many subjects (also religion) in the school, says:

YG: It was an Arabic school, but, since it was inside a mosque, since it was nearly a mosque, it was called “Islamic school”. But, to tell the truth, we taught the Egyptian programmes, also the religious education text book was the one used in Egypt, it was requested by the parents. There was also a request to teach students more religious aspects, because the Egyptian book was quite short. So parents asked for more teaching, i.e. the Koran. But it was optional, it was not compulsory. For those who wanted this, there was an hour of in depth teaching. Those who did not want this, ok, they were not obliged to.

I: Did you agree with the choice of families to send their children to the *via Quaranta* school?

YG: I do not know. I cannot say that I do not agree, because everyone is free to choose, because for example a Jewish parent chooses to send his/her child to a Jewish school...if he/she chooses....there are many schools, there is the Chinese school, the Japanese school, the German school, so....they are here, in Milan. So if a parent of Arab origin wants to send his/her child to an Arab school, there is respect, he/she has the right to do this. Then I have the right to do what I think (YG, Egyptian teacher).

The interviewee says that the school offers the possibility to study Islam in depth but he stresses that it was not compulsory. In this way he tries to point out that it was not a religious school, but an Arab one. Nevertheless, its name was meaningful: it was called “*Fagr Al Islam*”, i.e. “the dawn of Islam”, a name that produces ambiguity and may make people think it was a religious school, contrary to what YG says.

A different point of view is expressed by another interviewee, an Italian man representative of an association that kept in touch with the school to organize remedial lessons and support activities for students. Since the man helped the responsible of the school to organize their activities and to transmit the image of a good school, at the same time he admits that the school was orthodox:

MZ: There were the needs of the families who have children here, the necessity to make them follow a double programme<sup>54</sup>. Firstly via Jenner<sup>55</sup> did it, then people from that community argued among themselves, and via Quaranta was opened, the school was moved to via Quaranta along with the entire way of thinking of those people...who are not fundamentalists but are certainly very orthodox...therefore with quite an aggressive way of preaching and teaching (MZ, representative of an Italian association).

A third representation of the school is that of a professor who tried to let Arab children attend Italian schools in their free time to learn Italian. He clearly explains the difference between a religious school and an Islamic school, two types of school that, by contrast, were considered to be the same thing by the mass media and newspapers. RA agrees with those who say that the school was an Egyptian school, but he outlines that it had a religious approach:

RA: The name of the school was “Fagr Al Islam”, i.e. “the dawn of Islam”, so it was denoted religiously although it was not a Madrasah, as some people said, because the Koranic school, where the Koran is studied, where catechism is done, is different. So there was ambiguity on the part of the media, and this was done deliberately. Actually, it was an Egyptian school but with Islamic overtones (RA, academic).

RA accuses the mass media of spreading false representations of the school and of immigrants in general, and he warns against paying attention to these misleading images, which negatively influence the public’s perception of the events. Although the image that the mass media give of the school stresses its religious aspects, it is also necessary not to minimize the special characteristics of the school, i.e. the fact that it was attended by mainly Egyptian children, who did their final exams at the Egyptian Consulate every year, and who studied Egyptian from books. RA’s advice, therefore, is that on the one hand we shouldn’t fully believe the mass media, but on the other hand we should realize that it was an unusual school. MZ explains the families’ needs and claims very well:

MZ: The reason for this school’s existence was not because of a problem of integration in Italy, but because of a problem of integration in Egypt. It was just opposite, the need was that many families made children come back to Egypt after the third year in middle school, they made them study in Egypt, because it costs less to study, there university costs less. By contrast, those who decided to stay here went to Italian schools maybe as early as the third year of middle school (MZ, representative of an Italian association).

So, in the opinion of some interviewees the aim of the school and the choices of the families were not the teaching of religion. The reason why Arab families send their children to this school was instrumental: to teach children Arabic culture and language in order to go back to Egypt with a valid qualification.

After the closure of the school, Via Ventura school was set up for the same reason. Indeed when the via Quaranta school closed, Egyptian families did not send their children to Italian schools,

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<sup>54</sup> He is referring to the need for students to follow both the Italian and the Egyptian programmes.

<sup>55</sup> This Islamic community is based in via Jenner, a street in Milan. Although the site is not a mosque, it is known as “the mosques of via Jenner”. It is often at the core of the public and political debate, especially because of the arrest in 2007 of some terrorists who attended it (among them there was also an imam).

which did not satisfy their requirements. To avoid children dropping-out of school some Muslim people with the help of the Italian association “Associazione Insieme”, decided to build the via Ventura school. This school was different from the previous one, because both Italian programmes and Egyptian programmes were taught. Secondly, its representative declared that it was secular. Thirdly, it was set up thanks to the support of the Egyptian Consulate too. Finally it wanted to obtain recognition as a “foreign school”, so it began to follow the procedure to do it. But it encountered many difficulties, due to the opposition of the institutions and some politicians.

For some interviewees, the reason for the existence of these two schools was not only an instrumental one, but there was also a more abstract reason, to transmit cultural and identity values to children, to bring them up based on an Arab education style:

RA: I can understand, people care about the education of their children and...they see some Western models that they do not like, especially female models, because girls, even when they are very young, they maybe dress in a certain way, they are defiant, they swear, they smoke and...so in that school there was moral preservation...for the same reason why we send our children to Catholic schools. The families often chose to do this, not only because of the better quality of teaching but also because they say: “I know that there are certain values, certain principles are respected”. There are also Muslims who send their children, especially girls, to private schools managed by nuns, because they say: “ I can relax, because my girl does not come back home swearing, dressing in a certain way, behaving in a certain way, which I do not like”. There is this reason, surely, and it is as important as the preservation of a language, of a certain qualification. And also this seems right to me, because it could happen in some state schools that classmates offend your sensitivity a little (RA, academic).

The school, like other private or faith schools, is seen as a context in which children are protected, where specific cultural values and rules are transmitted to them, and where they cannot meet deviant peers who might influence them negatively. The interviewee outlines that this need is shared by Italians and foreign parents: stopping their children from becoming defiant and rude is a common objective.

The importance of transmitting a certain education style is linked to the cultural background of these families, as LA, a teacher who began to collaborate with the via Quaranta school and then filled the position of head-teacher at via Ventura school for a brief time says:

US: They took their children there because they were sure that they would be taught...like in some of the more closed Catholic schools...a choice like this...they were sure that all the values... I understood many things because I saw that most families came from two Egyptian areas, the Fayoum and the Nile delta, which are farming areas. So, they have a rural mentality. So this attachment to...it was not a problem of...as I can say...of orthodox Islam. It was a problem of tradition, of tradition, like our Sicilian women, who dressed for many years in black clothes and with a headscarf. This type of closure, of attachment, which seems to be like armour....but it is cultural armour, absolutely, linked to tradition (US, ex head-teacher of via Ventura school).

It is interesting to note the discrepancies between what the interviewees say and what was written in newspapers about the reasons for the school's existence. The former outlined the need of families to teach Arabic, to make students do the Egyptian exams, to transmit their culture and identity; the latter outlined that the aim was to remain isolated, not to be integrated, to build a ghetto-



school and, in the extreme, to bring up fundamentalist people (in *Corriere della Sera*, 16.07.2004). Probably the self segregation of minorities is seen as an attempt not to be integrated: in areas of public and political opinion, integration is achieved when minorities become similar to the majority, when they abandon their cultural and religious traits to become assimilated. Their desire and need to preserve their identity is perceived as an obstacle to the process of integration (or rather, of assimilation).

In 2005 the local institutions began to be opposed to the school and ordered inspections to verify the school's conditions. Because the hygiene and health conditions were inadequate, the school was closed. The interviewees say that the school should have been closed just because of these problems, but for other reasons that concerned education and the well-being of children:

RA: The American school, the French school could also make sense, like an Arab or Islamic school. But the condition is that it should provide a good education, it should be as good as a state school. So, I saw poor and inadequate provision in via Quaranta, rather than just a monocultural and monoreligious ghetto – which could be a risk. It was not a good school (...). Teachers were all mother tongue, they said they were qualified to teach, but I have never seen their qualifications. Someone studied pedagogy, or went to University, but most spoke only Arabic. We saw that when the journalists went there, the children had to interpret for their teachers. And this is not positive because if your teacher has been in Italy for years and he does not know Italian, he is not a good model of integration for you. You are in a school where only Arabic is taught, why should you have to learn the local language, if you have these models? I think that teachers were chosen from those who were not well integrated, who had not learnt Italian very well, who preferred to live in an Arab context....in a word, models of unsuccessful integration, without accusing them of extremism or fundamentalism (RA, academic).

In RA's opinion, the reasons why the school had to be closed were linked to the education of children and their integration. These reasons seem to be more important than the condition of the building and they allow the interviewee to better justify his position in favour of closing the school.

Nevertheless, what we would like to stress here is the discrepancy between the frame used by the interviewees and those used by institutions and politicians. They are all opposed to the school but their reasons are based on different frames: the former justify their opposition in terms of integration, the rights and the well-being of the children, the latter cite hygiene and security reasons (the inadequacy of the building but also the fear that fundamentalist people would be brought up there)<sup>56</sup>.

Two interviewees say that rather than for reasons of hygiene, the institution was opposed to the school because of the fear of terrorism:

YG: In my opinion there were two reasons. Firstly, some years before, there were the events of the 11th September. So they were worried, they were worried about Islam, about Muslims, and they were checking...then they found some people who were part of...I do not know...of some secret organizations, i.e. Al-Qaeda – I heard – so...they did not find other secrets, but they found the via Quaranta school and... (they said): "we'll let people know that we are checking everything"...but the school existed before their checks, and nobody said anything, the school was in the city. So they checked and they closed the school, because they said that it was an Islamic school where extremist children were brought up

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<sup>56</sup> It is interesting to note that the hygiene and security reasons are the frame on which the discourses against the school are built but they are not the actual reasons: the main worries concern the integration of immigrants.

I: Magdi Allam also said this...

YG: Yes, but he did not come to the school, he did not come to see the programmes, how teachers taught. We were all normal teachers. When I left the school, I worked in Milan's schools, in various projects, with the University, with the Provincial Education Department. I always taught as a teacher...We are all ordinary people (YG, Egyptian teacher).

Fears regarding security issues influence the relationship between Muslims and the host society, and consequently Muslims are treated differently from other minorities.

In US's opinion the difficulties of tolerating Muslims depend on the power of political forces:

US: At the beginning the situation was paradoxical, because when via Quaranta was irregular, the Milan Municipality provided money and financed projects. When via Quaranta began the procedure to become legal...a person should say: "Institutions are happy". They were officially. They also said there was an available building in via Zama to open the foreign school. Then the political parties...I am sure the Northern League party...the political parties within the Municipality stopped everything when Muslims obtained visibility through official recognition. Because there should be no visibility of this minority. Look at what is happening to the mosques. In your opinion is it possible that a European city has no place...it does not permit...it does not build?...they have created local regulations intentionally which make the Municipality take charge of giving a permit to open a place of worship. It is only to stop them (US, ex head-teacher of via Ventura school).

US outlines the paradoxical behaviour of the Milan Municipality. At the beginning it supported the school and it even gave financial and material support. But then, when the issue went to the core of public and political debate, the Municipality got worried about its political support and about the reactions of the Northern League party. So it changed its attitude towards the school radically and the Muslim minority, also by bringing in some regulations to impede Muslims' claims (i.e. places of worship). Opposition to minorities' demands emerges in the case of Muslims but not in the case of other minorities. As regards schools in particular, the interviewees quote the case of Jewish schools to explain the discrepancies of treatment between minority groups. As MZ says:

MZ: Up to three years ago I lived opposite a Jewish school, that orthodox...there you cannot enter... And when I entered, it seemed like seeing something similar to via Quaranta school: a person meets you and you don't see anything, anybody. In my opinion it does not work. It is a ghetto, isn't it? Via Quaranta is a ghetto, sure, there is the danger that these things become....but, I want to say, I often go to Argentina, and there are some neighbourhoods that started out as ghettos and they were the Italian ghettos, so it is quite understandable that this happens, they are social processes so...the issue is delicate...it is the exploitation and contamination of fundamentalism, this is the problem (MZ, representative of an Italian association).

Since the Jewish school is a ghetto like the via Quaranta school, it did not provoke a debate and, in MZ's opinion this depends on the issue of fundamentalism. Both are the result of typical processes: the need to stay with people who are perceived as similar, who have the same needs and demands, who want to grow up in a specific cultural and/or religious context. Nevertheless, the

Muslim school is linked to fundamentalism in the public's opinion, and for this reason it frightens people.

For other interviewees the Jewish and the Muslim school are not equal, but they provide students with an education that is qualitatively different:

RA: After 2000 years of diasporas, the Jewish know very well that their future, also their professional future, depends on good education, too. So, since from the religious or normative point of view the Jewish school could seem...I 'm not saying fundamentalist...but very, very traditional, Italian is taught there, English is taught, it is a high quality school. So, the problem is that a school could have a rigorous approach - like certain Catholic schools - but it cannot be a shack. There (i.e. in via Quaranta) the problem was two-fold: the school was strict about some aspects, but it was also a poor quality school. If you are in a paramilitary school you leave with an excellent education and you say "ok". I would not send my son in a school like this, with a rigorous discipline, but...what an education! Anyway, there are some people who believe in this discipline and they say "it's character-forming, they make a man of you!". There could be pros and cons. They are high quality schools, so this rigor is balanced. Have you seen films like "Full metal jacket"? There you can see this aspect, of the discipline, and the feeling of being part of an elite, like in "An Officer and a Gentleman, Top Gun...", here this aspect is romanticized, but there is the idea of the private school as an elite school (RA, academic).

In RA's words the Jewish school is compared to some Catholic schools or paramilitary schools, where the common characteristic is to teach children through severe discipline. By contrast, the Muslim school is a poor quality school, although there is a severe and strict approach towards students. Although RA is not completely against private schools, and specifically religious schools, he outlines the risks of these kinds of schools:

RA: The risk is the ghetto, in particular when the school has a strong religious orientation because if you don't mix with others it might be because you don't want to be contaminated. Maybe the old Catholic schools also had this idea, i.e. the single sex schools. Surely, for those religions with a strong normative orientation, such as Judaism or Islam, closure refusal to mix is stronger, partly because they are a minority, partly because there is the entire issue of ritual purity, of things which are permitted and not permitted. And I cannot exclude the fact that children grow up in such a monochrome context that during their life they could have difficulties interacting more openly and clearly with people who have other traditions (RA, academic).

The risk, therefore, that a faith school becomes a ghetto is stronger for some kinds of schools, such as the Judaic or Muslim ones, for two reasons: firstly because of the perception of them as a minority, which leads people to emphasize and reinforce their differences, also through the creation of their own schools; secondly because of the characteristics of their faith.

A different point of view is that of YG, who states that religious schools are not good because they educate children differently:

YG: I am against private schools, religious schools, I do not agree because one child is educated in one way, another child in a different way, another child has not been educated so....I am against private religious schools. These things could be resolved in another way, with other

solutions, in state schools. For example, there could be the religious education lessons, some could attend lessons in Catholicism, some in Islam, some....then, as I said before, some lessons could be attended together, shared together. Because there is not so much difference between religions, if a person believes in God, he/she wants to be good, he/she wants to behave well and to love others. All the religions teach these things. So, if there is not a religion that teaches people to be fundamentalists, to go and fight, to kill women and children. These people are non believers, they are not religious. So, when we were in via Quaranta school and people said: "it is an Islamic school", I always said: "No, it is an Arab school. It is an Arab school, an Arab school". Because we did not create a religious school, we did not. We wanted to build an Arab school, for all the Arab, not for all the Muslims (YG, Egyptian teacher).

It is interesting to note that the interviewee is a teacher in the via Quaranta school, which was criticised for being a religious school. We wonder if YG stated that religious schools are bad in order to defend the via Quaranta school: if it had been a religious school he would not have taught there!!

However, in general, in the opinion of the interviewees, religious schools are not the best solution for guaranteeing the freedom of religion, but this right could be guaranteed in other ways. They agree that the secularism should characterize state schools and the freedom of religion should be guaranteed in everyone's private life. Although one's own faith could and should be practised in the private sphere, it oversteps the mark when people ask for places of worship to be built and recognised.

For example, in YG's opinion the freedom of religion could be put into practice in two ways: the possibility to build mosques where people can pray and the ability of the Muslim community to keep in touch with Italians:

YG: We need many things from the Italian state, but we also need many things from the Islamic community. The Islamic community should show...I do not know...citizenship, it should be integrated more and more, it should show that Muslims are citizens...and they try, but the Islamic community in Milan is poor, and the community has no funding. When they have some money, they will be able to interact with Italians, to be more open and helpful. Now they are a little more helpful, I saw, they speak with the mass media, they try to participate as citizens. But I see other difficulties...the media are quite opposed to Muslims, to the Muslim community. Some TV channels, some newspapers...( YG, Egyptian teacher).

After affirming the right to build places of worship, YG tries to balance this assertion with the concept that Muslims also have to commit themselves to participating in Italian society. Integration can happen if both parties collaborate.

MZ also thinks that to foster freedom of religion it is necessary to build places where Muslims can pray, but he also points out that the Imams' training and the control of the State are important:

MZ: In other countries mosques have been built. Mosques should be built, they are also works of art, there are modern and wonderful mosques in Great Britain, etc. and I cannot understand why we have horrible gyms as places of worship. I say: "let's build a nice place of worship. Let's make an agreement with the University of Cairo or those in Saudi Arabia, and they send us an imam, not just any old imam, but one who really knows how to preach. Of course, I insist that not controlling the religious aspects, not controlling the way they are managed is a risk...it is a risk because controlling preaching is not guaranteed, there is no control (MZ, representative of an Italian association).

In MZ's opinion, freedom of religion should be respected but only if strict control is guaranteed both by the institutions of the immigrants' countries of origin and by those of the host countries.

The most open-minded interviewee is RA, who proposes a radical change in Italian schools, pointing out that secularism should characterize the education system:

RA: In my opinion religious schools cannot - and must not - be the solution, they are legitimate but the idea that Italian schools are divided based on religion seem mad to me. It is not part of our DNA. You should send Christians to Christian schools, Shiites to Shiite schools...Paradoxically, in Italy there are some politicians, and maybe also some bishops, who said that, because of the increasing number of Muslims, it will be necessary to teach Islam in state schools. In my opinion it would be a terrible defeat, because Catholic religion lessons are anything but catechism. So, why should we maintain a denominational approach opening to the followers of other religions who will do the lessons? On the contrary, we should change the contents and do a lesson about the religion in general and we could also consider it compulsory, since it would no longer be denominational. It would be an advantage if the Christian religion were also compulsory, but from a cultural and historical point of view, not a denominational one. If you do not know the Holy Bible, you do not know anything about the arts, about music, about philosophy...15% of Muslim children in Milan schools do not ask to be exempted from Catholic religion lessons. Firstly, because they know very well that the child will never convert to Catholicism after attending these lessons; secondly, they think that because they live in a Catholic country, the child has to know something about the Catholic religion. And then the child does not feel different from the others, so he/she does not want to go out during religion lessons (RA, academic).

Without neglecting the importance of knowing the Christian religion, which is part of the Italian heritage and is useful for understanding the developments of other fields of knowledge, SM sustains that it is enough to teach it from an historical and cultural point of view. In this way it could be taught to all students as part of the national heritage. SM's ideas are very similar to those of many of the teachers interviewed: all the aspects of Italian culture and tradition should be shared by all students but based on their cultural significance. The strategy of not highlighting their religious significance is considered effective in respecting foreign students' diversities and at the same time including them in Italian civil life.

In any case, although state schools should maintain their universalistic and secular approach, freedom of religion is a fundamental right of the individual and for this reason it has to be respected:

RA: Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution, apart from the Agreements. You, as a human being, resident in Italian territory, you have the right to express your faith. But what happens? This wonderful principle is addressed in every local regulation so the local administrations – especially right wing administrations or Northern League ones – create obstacles: “have you opened this cultural association and then have you transformed it into a place of worship? Well, that means you’ve changed its allocated use, so I’m going to stop you, because you are trying to bypass the law”. And clearly people are worried after the terrorist attacks and do not have a good opinion about Islam, so there are these mad proposals of the Northern League: to organize a referendum in the areas where the mosques should be built. It goes against the Constitution, obviously, because my right to pray must not be influenced by the majority of the population of the area where I live. But surely, a mosque near my home is like a

dumping ground near my home, it is like a Roma camp near my home, so everybody says “yes, but it has to be far from my home” (RA, academic).

In this abstract RA outlines the right to express one’s own faith and the difficulties faced by the Muslims in doing so. Terrorism has influenced public opinion and the political arena, it has caused the hostility towards Muslims and the desire to limit their freedom of religion. Although it is a right of all human beings, the Northern League Party tries to block certain religious practices, in the name of Italians’ rights, their well-being and security. It is interesting to note that the frame of the Northern League Party works well: the Italians feel threatened by immigrants and by their claims, so to limit their freedom of religion (by impeding the construction of mosques and of private schools) is a good strategy to control them, to guarantee and protect Italians’ rights before satisfying minorities’ demands.

### **3.5.3. Conclusion**

The case of via Quaranta school is representative of how different social actors construct different frames to talk about religious and cultural diversities. The mass media and politicians described the school as a Madrasah, stressing the religious character of it, so that they referred to the dangers of fundamentalism. There may be two reasons why they highlighted the religious character of the school and they are interrelated: firstly, concerns about Islam and Muslims; secondly, the usefulness of the religious topics to carry out a certain political campaign.

By contrast, the Islamic community tried to deny that frame and to outline a different character of the school, i.e. being an Arab school. It highlighted its instrumental nature, not its religious and identity significance: the aim of the school was to teach Egyptian students so that they could go back home knowing Arabic and having a valid qualification. Moreover, through this frame more information was given: foreign children would have come back to Egypt, immigrant families would have left Italy, and this frame reassured Italians.

A third frame, shared by some civil society actors and politicians was about the danger that the demand for recognition by the Islamic community would be damaging for children who attended the school. The lack of language skills in Italian and isolation, without any relationships with the Italian education system was damaging for the children, who were not prepared for entering Italian secondary school if they did not go to Egypt. Since the civil society actors thought that the right to learn Arabic and to maintain the link with the culture of origin were legitimate, they supported the need to keep in touch with Italian society, albeit in a gradual way and while respecting Muslims’ cultural needs.

Based on the ACCEPT framework, it can be said that this case study is representative of how the issue of cultural pluralism within the education system has not yet been fully addressed. Although the management of cultural and religious diversity within state schools has already dealt with the subject and it continues to be at the core of public and political debate (as we saw in the first case study), the issue of private and faith schools has not yet become a main topic on the Italian political agenda. The case of via Quaranta school is representative of how Italian institutions are not prepared to manage the possible future claims of some minorities. The way public institutions faced the issue was characterized by liberal intolerance, which “reflects a principled concern with the neutrality or universalism of the public realm” (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011), and particularly in this case of the education system. The demands of minorities, such as the demand to build a faith or private school and to have it recognised formally, highlight what is alien in the national culture. Besides, these claims are seen as a three-fold threat: firstly, by some they are seen as instruments to defend their own cultural identity and to reinforce self-segregation, thus leading to the failure of integration; secondly, they are seen as a threat to public security; finally, they are seen as a threat to integration and the well-

being of pupils, even by well-meaning people who usually defend the demands of minorities. All these fears lead to the adoption of an intolerant approach, which is also used by the government to gain political consensus: it can be an effective strategy to reassure the citizens that it is possible to keep minority groups and their claims under control.

While in the political arena the main attitude was one of intolerance, among civil society actors the attitudes were different. But generally, even among those who were more in favour of defending Muslims' claims, the common attitude was one of toleration: since there are some demands made by Muslims and it is not possible to ignore them, the best thing to do is to satisfy the minimum requests they make. In this case toleration "does not come because people 'resolve their differences'" (Creppel 2008, 322) but simply because they decide to suspend their power not to tolerate, and they assume a position of resignation along the continuum between resignation and enthusiasm (Walzer 1997) which characterized toleration.

Nevertheless, we think that neither intolerance nor minimal toleration can be useful in resolving the issues of private and religious schools. The Italian education system is traditionally based on universalism and equality, and it consists mostly of state schools. Besides, the foreign population (and consequently the composition of foreign students)<sup>57</sup> in Italy is very heterogeneous so it would be difficult to satisfy the demands of all the minorities (both introducing measures to satisfy immigrants' demands in state schools and controlling all the private schools that might be set up). Therefore, in order to guarantee cultural pluralism it is necessary to protect the right of minorities to build their schools; by contrast, minorities' schools have to adhere to national regulations and education programmes. Otherwise, other solutions can be applied, such as that of making children go to state schools and at the same time allowing them to attend courses in their free time when they can learn their mother tongue, culture and religion. This practice is already applied by some Muslim families, as various teachers told us. These courses could become more structured and those who teach them could begin to interact and collaborate with state schools, in order to accommodate their work and to avoid overloading children with too much information and subjects to study. This could be a solution: to make children attend state schools but also to satisfy their parents' needs to teach them something related to their culture of origin<sup>58</sup>.

However, regarding the management of cultural and religious pluralism in the education system, Italy still has a long way to go and the goal of going "beyond toleration" is still a long way off. But the case of the via Quaranta school can be the starting point to reflect on the issue of private and faith schools. Spreading concern and encouraging intolerance - as some public and political discourses do - do not resolve the problem, whereas at the same time minimal toleration is not enough. The case of via Quaranta school has proved that the minorities' claim to build their own schools will increase in the near future and the public institutions will have to think more systematically about it.

### **3.6. The management of cultural and religious diversities in the Italian education system**

The two key events are useful in understanding how cultural and religious diversities of foreign students are managed within the Italian education system. The frames built by the politicians, by the mass media and civil society actors are very different and they swing from one position to another, assuming different shades of meanings between intolerance and respect for diversities.

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<sup>57</sup> For an overview of the main immigrant national groups resident in Italy see "Tolerance and cultural diversities in Italy" (<http://www.eui.eu/Projects/ACCEPT/Research/ProjectReports/NationalDiscourses.aspx>, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> At the same time attention should be paid to the risk of overloading the children, who should be engaged in many tasks.

As regards the presence of foreign children in schools and the accommodation of their diversities in everyday school life and in the curricula, the findings highlight that teachers and head-teachers share the Italian education system's approach, i.e. the intercultural approach, and they try to put it into practice. Based on this approach, diversities have to be appreciated and cultural exchange has to be favoured. This aim is achieved quite easily in the curricula and in the celebrations of festivities: multicultural recognition seems to prevail during students' religious and cultural festivities, and their origins are covered in the curricula. In practice, the schools where the interviewees work organize special activities and celebrations for the end of Ramadan, for the Chinese New Year, etc. or, if this is not possible, students are asked to talk about their festivities and to share them with others. Nevertheless, the celebration of the various festivities is not enough, and it is necessary to go beyond a sort of a "multiculturalism of consumption" (Colombo, 2002) which sees differences as something curious, strange or attractive aesthetically. Indeed, as one of the participants in the discussion group said (SC, responsible for interculturality, Fondazione Ismu), teachers must reflect on their idea of the concept of "interculturality" and on how they try to put their idea into practice. In fact, the risk of "multiculturalism of consumption" is to evaluate differences based on their appeal, without actually recognizing them.

However, the recognition and the celebration of foreign students' festivities is a good practice on the part of schools, even more so if we consider that all these initiatives are organized by the individual schools and teachers. In fact there are no clear practical instructions from the Ministry of Education on this issue. So, there are good practices from below, but there are no clear positions from above. Besides that, although different festivities are celebrated during the school year and within the regular school activities, the fact that immigrant children might wish to follow different customs and festivities does not seem to be thematized at all within the Italian education system or by teachers. The existence of different festivities may not be easily compatible with the Italian school year timetable/schedule, but the possibility of changing or adapting it to immigrants' needs remains remote in the Italian context.

As regards curricula, teachers talk about the countries of origin of the students, they use fairy tales known by all the children, they talk about different religions, etc. In this case there are some practical instructions in some of the documents on interculturality issued in recent years. First of all the document "The Italian strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origins" (2007), the first document which gave systematic and practical instructions to deal with the presence of foreign students in schools and described an Italian model for foreign children's integration. Nevertheless, the document only contains instructions and suggestions and its implementation is not required by law. Besides, its dissemination has not been through and it is not known to everybody. Teachers, therefore, have introduced concepts and knowledge which refer to different cultures, but at the institutional level in-depth discussion on how to broaden curricula has not yet been carried out. Specifically, the adoption new textbooks which represent everybody, the inclusion of foreign authors in the curricula and the study of subjects from different points of view have not yet been considered and discussed. On the contrary, a Western and ethnocentric point of view still prevails today in the curricula and in the teachers' approach to education.

Among those who know about the documents on interculturality and who are sensitive to the issue of foreign students, toleration is a shared frame of reference, although mostly on an ideological level.

Teachers share the concept of interculturality and in their vocabulary there are many terms linked to the idea of interculturality: they often use the words "cultural exchange, appreciation of the differences, respect, recognition, etc.", but if we look at their actions and behaviour, it is clear that it is more difficult to put into practice all these excellent concepts. If minorities demand anything other than the celebration of festivities and changes to the curricula, the teachers' attitude swings from intercultural acceptance to toleration and more rarely to an attitude of closure or resistance. The former is put into practice when foreign students ask to practice their cultural or religious traditions: they



could be absent at lunchtime during the Ramadan, they could wear a headscarf at school, and they could be absent during their festivities. Generally, there is intercultural acceptance when students' cultural and religious practices do not affect the organization and the pace of school life. Toleration prevails when some demands from families of foreign origin are in some ways acknowledged<sup>59</sup>, although these are considered wrong by teachers. The Muslim parents' attitude towards their girls is a case in point. The prohibition to go to the swimming pool with classmates or to go on a school trip is not acknowledged as a reasonable demand but it is tolerated. In these cases teachers try to persuade parents that their claims damage children well-being; if they cannot reach a compromise with them, they have to accept parents' claims. Minimal toleration and a sort of resignation are adopted "for the sake of peace" (Walzer 1997). To apply the intercultural approach is more difficult when teachers have to deal with some practices which come from cultural and/or religious prescriptions and rules, and which are in contrast with the principles of the Italian pedagogic culture (e.g. gender equality, the value of physical education lessons or school trips).

Finally, an attitude of closure or resistance emerges when students' rights are not respected due to their parents' demands, wishes and attitude. For example, the severe education style of some parents is tolerated (although criticized) as long as it does not damage children's rights and well-being. In some rare extreme cases excessively aggressive behaviour is condemned and drastic measures are taken by teachers against the parents.

It is also interesting to note that teachers and head-teachers are inclined to mix the issue about the management of cultural diversities with the issue of academic achievement. This is partly due to the fact that up to a few years ago most foreign students in the education system were children born abroad and who arrived in Italy during their infancy or adolescence. So, the schools paid particular attention to the language learning process of these students, overlooking the management of their diversities. Now schools have implemented some strategies and good practices to address the arrival of foreign students, who are no longer seen as an emergency to cope with. Nevertheless, the attitude of mixing the issue of academic achievement with the issue of cultural diversity still exists and the former are sometimes explained and justified based on the latter.

The attitudes of teachers are culturally constructed and they are used unintentionally by the social actors to understand the behaviour or attitude of some migrants. For example teachers often say that immigrant children are more diligent than Italians because in their culture school is a very important institution and it has to be respected (teachers also have to be respected). Besides the fact that this consideration is contradicted by the data about the academic achievement of foreign students, national and international research outlines the fact that for immigrant families school is seen as a way of getting away from disadvantaged social positions and of social mobility. So, children's commitment to school is due to the representation of it as an instrument to improve the social position of their families, not to a culturally founded assumption that educational institutions have to be respected. Teachers sometimes say "They do things this way, they behave in this way because it is in their culture", and based on this consideration they explain or justify children's behaviour, without considering that their explanations could be influenced by their culturally given thoughts and opinions. Some children's habits, i.e. to slouch while they are having lunch, to belch, not to respect women teachers (we are referring to Muslim boys), are explained culturally, and other types of explanations are overlooked (i.e. the need to attract attention for many reasons, the lack of rules for social behaviour, etc.)<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Demands of minorities are made informally and locally, even by individuals and in single schools. There are no official demands by the minorities and there are no official instructions by the institutions on how to manage them.

<sup>60</sup> The culturally constructed explanations are used to justify children's behaviours positively and negatively. For example their good manners towards teachers are explained by some supposed cultural traits of immigrant children who, in teachers' opinion, are taught to respect adults more than Italian children.

Regarding the *via Quaranta* school, the approach to diversity is stricter. We believe that this fact depends partly on the actors involved: the Islamic community. While in the first case the managing of diversity regards all foreign students without distinction, here the social actors are Muslims. The term “Muslims” brings to many people’s minds a religious community that is different from the Christian one, moreover a community which is linked to Islamic terrorism. So, there are many positions and disagreements, also among those who usually put themselves forward in defence of immigrants’ rights or who are usually more open-minded. In the political arena intolerance often emerges, partly to obtain the electoral consensus: through this, the political forces answer the Italians’ worries about immigration. Among civil society actors there are differences of opinion and there is no a general consensus about how to manage religious and cultural pluralism. Generally among these the attitude is of toleration: because it is not possible to ignore minorities’ claims, the best solution is to accommodate them reducing to the minimum the negative effects, especially on foreign children. So, the solution to manage their claims can be to support their school organizing remedial lessons (i.e. to learn Italian, to do homework, etc.) or helping them in the process of formal recognition of the school.

To summarize, the two cases belong to two different frames. In the first case a progressive approach is shared by the social actors who work in the schools: separation, exclusion and ghettos are rejected, and cultural or religious diversities can be treated with toleration or, in the better cases, with intercultural acceptance. Interculturality is in fact the normative principle which in teachers’ opinions all education practitioners should apply in order to achieve integration. Nevertheless, as we can note through the data, interculturalism is interpreted and applied differently by teachers, according to their personal evaluations, situations and the school contexts. In some circumstances they try to apply their interpretation of the intercultural approach, favouring cultural exchange and making the differences interesting. But, in other situations it is more difficult, and teachers apply a sort of minimal acceptance. This attitude allows teachers to preserve the balance in their relationships with foreign students and parents, but it does not favour a positive recognition of differences, including, most importantly, integration.

The progressive approach described above is shared (almost theoretically) by all teachers and head-teachers, but there is some disagreement at the political level. In the motion and in the following debates, foreign students are considered as a problem. Their integration, therefore, is possible only if they can become similar to their Italian schoolmates, i.e. if they assimilate to the majority.

In the second case, the approaches are different, and also among the civil society actors who usually promote and defend immigrant’s rights and demands, a progressive approach is not shared. Indeed some of them defend immigrants’ rights and demands indistinctly, others are mainly worried about three aspects. Firstly, they stress the importance of the secularism of the Italian education system; secondly, they are worried about the Muslim communities, which are perceived as very different culturally and religiously; finally, they think that the risk of supporting Muslim schools is that it can produce self segregation and exclusion. So, opinions also differ among the “pro-immigrants” social actors, whereas the political arena is characterized by an intense fight between the supporters of the school in the name of pluralism and the opponents, who defend the respect for the rules and who criticize the minorities’ self-exclusion.

The management, therefore, of cultural and religious diversity is a new issue in the Italian context, and one which raises many questions and problems. We think that this depends partly on the history of Italy. Before the unitarian process was carried out, the Italian territory was divided into many small States, with their own history, language and culture. Political unity was achieved only 150 years ago, but at that time there was still no national consciousness. The process of creating a national consciousness among Italians was very long and it has not yet been completed today, insomuch as social and political movements which defend local and regional demands are successful among the population. Also for this reason Italy has difficulty in managing and tolerating diversity, even more so when diversity involves many aspects (i.e. religious, cultural, ethnic, etc.). But, it is necessary to distinguish between the institutional level and everyday life. As regards the former, there is an

oscillation between intolerance, toleration and some attitudes of intercultural acceptance. The Northern League Party<sup>61</sup>, with its anti-immigrant campaigns, has influenced the entire political approach towards cultural and religious diversity: intolerance has encouraged actions and initiatives against immigrants, among which the most important was the “Security Package”, a package of severe measures which affect immigrants in particular, especially illegal residents<sup>62</sup>. It is worth noting here that the power of the Northern League party has recently decreased, following the administrative elections (May 2011) and the accusation of misuse of public money by some members of the party. These events have probably contributed to a decrease in anti-immigrant discourses. However, religious and cultural toleration, which, all things considered, was common in the Italian context, has now taken a few steps back. The new government run by Monti has not yet taken any measures about immigration issues, partly because the current priority is to try to resolve the economic crisis, partly because it probably does not want to provoke negative reactions from political parties.

Consequently, at the institutional level, one of the few more accepting approaches to diversity is that of the education system. Indeed, in the school context an approach that is characterized by intercultural acceptance is promoted and specified in some institutional documents. We are referring to the various documents about interculturality written since the 90s', where attention began to be paid to diversity in schools. In these documents, diversity is seen as an enriching element and has to be appreciated through mutual understanding and cultural exchange. The intercultural approach follows the traditional approach of the Italian school system, i.e. respecting differences and identities and the appreciation of human beings, based on a universalistic principle.

This is the frame which teachers and head-teachers refer to. They describe and represent a school life that is characterized by good practices and based on intercultural acceptance. Some difficulties in arranging relationships emerge, especially between teachers and foreign children's parents, because of the differences in perception of the school system and the role of the school, the relationships between teachers and parents and between teachers and children. But, in their opinion, it is possible to address these problems and to strike a balance with foreign families by developing the ability to approach others, understanding their reasons and needs, finally accepting them even if there is no appreciation.

Nevertheless, this shared positive representation contradicts other aspects, i.e. the lack of funding invested in projects aimed at foreign students or the data about the foreign students' drop-out rates. Indeed there is little investment, it has been reduced in the last few years and it is sometimes inadequate. The reduction of the number of language skills facilitators is a case in point (Caritas/Migrantes 2009). Secondly, the data about the academic achievement of foreign students are unsatisfactory: their drop-out rate is more than that of Italian students (Miur 2011, Casacchia et al. 2008) and as regards secondary schools, they are concentrated in technical and professional schools more than Italians (Ravecca 2009).

The intercultural approach, that is emphasized and appreciated by teachers, seems not to be confirmed by the data about students' academic achievements. Surely, the academic achievement depends on many factors, and it is not correct to think that good academic achievement is the result of a positive acceptance of diversity. Nevertheless, they highlight the fact that some elements of the

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<sup>61</sup> We should highlight that while we were writing this document, administrative elections were underway in some Italian provinces and municipalities. In those elections (May 2011) the power of the Northern League Party (and also of all the Centre right parties) decreased notably.

<sup>62</sup> The Security Package introduced regulations that refer to a widespread idea of urban safety in which aspects of combating crime are extended to include protection of urban standards and the repression of behavior that can disturb or annoy citizens (i.e. restrictions that obstruct the freedom of worship for Muslims or sanction the use of veils that hide their faces). The main areas of intervention regarded prostitution, alcohol abuse, vandalism and begging. In this way the Security Package directly or indirectly targeted the poorest and the most disorderly components of the immigrant population. Recently the Constitutional Court repealed the law giving excessive power to the Municipality mayors.

education system do not work and have to be improved; they lead us to hypothesize that there are also culturally founded difficulties in dealing with all the students equally, apart from their diversities.

It is a common belief among education staff and teachers that they have already implemented an intercultural approach and they can use it in everyday school life. Nevertheless, the data highlight that every school and every teacher forms its own conception of interculturality and applies it in his/her school context. Good practices are not shared among teachers and communicated to those who are not familiar with interculturality. They do not circulate within the education system, so any approaches and solutions that are adopted successfully in some contexts are not applied in others.

As regards the via Quaranta school, the frame is not only of intercultural acceptance, but there seem to be three representations of the civil society actors. Firstly, some social actors represent the school in a linguistic way. This frame is shared especially by the Islamic community and by the interviewees of Egyptian origin involved in the event. Secondly, the representation shared by many politicians, institutions and mass media was about the school as a religious and fundamentalist context. Finally, the frame shared by some Italian and foreign civil society actors is of the school as a foreign school. Based on this representation they began the process of gaining formal recognition and they obtained it for the via Ventura school (by changing some aspects of the curricula and of the organization of the school). Despite this, the via Ventura school could be compared neither to a faith school (such as the Catholic ones) nor to a foreign school. In public opinion and in the political arena it is treated differently and it is not fully recognized (although it has obtained formal recognition), unlike other foreign schools (such as the American, English, Jewish schools, etc.).

Despite the fact that the Italian education system has developed an idea of integration which can be achieved throughout interculturality, almost at a theoretically level, there are key messages arising from this study for education staff (head-teachers, teachers, linguistic facilitators, etc.) and policy makers.

Firstly, there is no shared concept of interculturality among teachers. Teachers are not supported in understanding whether or not they are applying interculturality appropriately, whether their practices are sufficient, whether their work is intercultural at all, in part or not at all. They are not trained to understand whether some behaviour of immigrant families depend on their cultural backgrounds or on other reasons (e.g. their economic condition, their levels of education, the lack of cultural instruments to understand the Italian society). It would be useful, therefore, to share good practices, e.g. by organizing meetings to compare different practices, providing teachers with permanent training on interculturality, making them abandon an ethnocentric approach. This is another important issue: to abandon the ethnocentric approach both in curricula and in practices. In the curricula this can be achieved by introducing foreign textbooks and authors, teaching students subjects including different points of view, transmitting the concept of a plural national identity. As regards practices, teachers have to reflect on their culturally constructed attitudes and actions, because these often lead them to explain migrants' behaviour misleadingly. They have to put aside stereotypes and to go beyond culturally based explanations.

The second key message is directed specifically at policy makers. School and the Italian education system is a deeply politicized topic, which has been at the core of political debate for at least 15 years. But the conflicts are external to the school context rather than internal, they come from within the political arena instead of from social actors who work in the schools (who, as we saw, share a clear approach). There is, therefore, still a big gap between the ideological discourses held in the national debate and the local practices carried out in everyday life. Neither is there any discussion between the two levels on how to form guidelines and criteria to refer to, so schools and teachers often manage diversity based on their own models of integration. When there are some debates, they are especially about the rights of the majority instead of the demands of the minorities. The minorities have not yet made any cultural requests (such as the headscarf for their girls, single sex gym classes,

etc.), whereas the majority group demands respect for Italian traditions and customs, such as the Christmas festivities or the presence of the crucifix in the classrooms. Policy makers, therefore, should be more in touch with education practitioners and with the organizations which deal with the leisure time of young people (e.g. NGOs, voluntary organizations). They should go beyond the ideological discourses on education and develop concrete instructions for practising interculturality, through their collaboration with head-teachers, teachers, pedagogists, experts in the education field and, last but not least, with educators who work in youth organizations. Together with these groups they can produce documents, favour their widespread circulation and make them operative. Finally, they should avoid indiscriminate funding cuts, which particularly affect support activities, they should organize intercultural activities for students and families, arrange language courses for students who do not know Italian very well and train teachers in broadening curricula and education styles. They have to go beyond their political and ideological views of the education system, because if they do not find a shared approach it will be difficult to improve it and to offer a better education for all students, both Italians and children of foreign origin.

#### 4. Tolerance and diversity challenges in Political life

The management of diversity in the public realm, specifically in the political arena, is more critical than that in the school context. In contrast with the education system, which has tried to accommodate the presence of students of foreign origin since the beginning, the political system is still reluctant to accept that minorities can represent their own political interests. Both the national and the local levels hinder the entry of minorities into the political arena. Rather, at local level, attempts to exclude migrants have occurred in the last few years also with regard to their social and civil rights, not only their political representation. The main instruments used to exclude migrants have been regulations adopted by some governments in Italian cities, i.e. the so-called “local policies of exclusion”.

Before going deeply into the issue, the chapter discusses the Italian context as regards the political participation and representation of migrants, paying attention to the national context and to the (weak) local experiences of participation promoted in some cities and regions. It then deals with the issue of immigrant associations, describing their characteristics and explaining the reasons why they have little power in political representation, and finally with trade unions and their role in representing migrants.

The core of the chapter is the case study of the “local policies of exclusion”, which were investigated through empirical research done in the Lombardy region (where most of the local policies of exclusion were introduced). The frames used by local politicians to justify their intolerant discourses and initiatives, and those used by civil society actors to fight against intolerance and defend minorities’ rights are analysed and discussed. These frames and discourses are in fact useful in understanding how the accommodation of diversities in public and political life is managed in Italy.

##### 4.1. The national context: immigrant laws and the political participation of migrants

In Italy the issue of the political participation of migrants is influenced by the citizenship law. Migrants can become Italian citizens - consequently they can vote or be voted for- after a long period of residence. The Italian citizenship law is based on *ius sanguinis* and states that citizenship can be obtained after 10 years residence for non EU nationals and after 4 years for EU nationals. People who were born in Italy to foreign parents (i.e. the second generations) can apply for Italian citizenship between the ages of 18 and 19, if they have lived continually in Italy since birth. The law was introduced in 1992 and modified the previous law, dating back to 1912: it tightened the rules for obtaining Italian citizenship (previously, only 5 years of residence were required), although it favoured the acquisition of citizenship for the descendants of Italians who emigrated a long time ago (for a deeper examination of the issue see Section.2.5).

The Italian citizenship law is therefore the most restrictive in EU15. In the last few years various changes to this law have been proposed by both left-wing and the right-wing parties. The former proposed reducing the period of residence required to obtain citizenship, and tried to make the naturalization easier for second generations; by contrast, the latter proposed to tighten the rules for obtaining citizenship, although some right-wing politicians themselves outlined the necessity “to be sensible” (as Mr. Fini said) and to work on the reform of the citizenship law (especially regarding the children of immigrants). Some attempts to propose a new law have also been made by civil society actors. Trade unions, Italian no-profit and voluntary associations, organizations which deal with immigration issues, politicians and immigrant associations (e.g. the G2 Network, a network of second generations) launched a campaign to propose two new laws in September 2011. The first concerns the

introduction of the right to vote at local level for non EU migrants who have been in Italy for 5 years; the second is about the reform of the citizenship law, introducing less restrictive rules, especially for children of immigrants. Now a petition with at least 50,000 signatures is being prepared in an attempt to campaign for the laws, but in the current political context these proposals have little chance of success.

Besides the citizenship law, the various immigration laws enacted from the '90s until today have not dealt with the political participation and representation of migrants and they have not provided legislative changes in order to introduce political rights for migrants.

Only the Turco-Napolitano law (1998) tried to introduce some changes in order to involve migrants politically. Specifically, it created three representative bodies, two at national level and one at local level<sup>63</sup>, whose aim was to supervise and examine migrants' economic, social and cultural issues, and to propose solutions. Nevertheless, since the beginning they have proved to be inefficient, due to their composition. Besides the Italian representatives, members of the most representative immigrant associations had to be part of these bodies, but it was difficult to identify which were the most representative. Consequently, it often occurred that only Italian representatives participated in the meetings of these bodies<sup>64</sup>.

The two national bodies were therefore unofficially disbanded by the Bossi-Fini law (2002). Only the Immigrant Territorial Councils still exist today.

The Turco-Napolitano law also introduced the right to vote at the local administrative elections for immigrants who had a Long-Term Residence Permit<sup>65</sup> (art. 38). Nevertheless, when the bill became law, article 38 was repealed. In the years that followed some bills were proposed to introduce immigrants' right to vote at the local level, but none of them became law.

The next immigration law, the Bossi-Fini law (2002), did not introduce any changes and it adhered only partially to the Strasburg Convention (1992). Although Italy signed the Convention, it excluded Chapter C from its adhesion, which recognised the right to vote for immigrants who have been living legally in the host countries for 5 years. So, while the European Union was - and still is - in favour of giving political rights to EU-nationals and non EU nationals who live in European countries, Italy - like some other European countries - is reluctant to do this (Fieri, Asgi 2005).

This attitude is partly due to the Italian political climate: the growing power of the Northern League Party<sup>66</sup>, with its hostility to immigrants, and a widespread need for security within the global context. Security has therefore become a fundamental issue for the current government, which, under the administration of the new Minister of Home Affairs Maroni<sup>67</sup>, introduced the so-called Security Package (2008)<sup>68</sup>, whose principal aim was to combat the illegal flow of migrants. Among the new

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<sup>63</sup> This was the *Council for non-EU workers and their families* (Consulta per i lavoratori immigrati e le loro famiglie), the *National Body for Co-ordinating Local Policies of Integration of Foreign Citizens* (Organismo nazionale di coordinamento per le politiche di integrazione sociale dei cittadini stranieri a livello locale) and the *Immigrant Territorial Councils* (Consigli territoriali per l'immigrazione).

<sup>64</sup> In 2002 for example 45 out of 103 Territorial Councils consisted only of Italians (Fieri, Asgi 2005).

<sup>65</sup> The Long-Term Resident Permit is issued for an indefinite period to people who have had a residence permit for more than six years in Italy, and who have a minimum income (equivalent to the amount of social security benefit).

<sup>66</sup> We should highlight that in the last administrative elections (May 2011) the power of the Northern League Party (and also that of all the centre right parties) decreased notably. More information about the birth, the success and the values/principles of the Northern League Party can be found in Cento Bull (2010).

<sup>67</sup> It is significant that a representative of the Northern League Party has been chosen as the Minister for Home Affairs.

<sup>68</sup> Many measures were introduced between 2008 and 2009, and were then gathered together in the Security Package.

rules introduced by the Security Package, more power has been given to mayors on the issues of urban safety. The result was the implementation of various local policies in many Italian cities, intended to guarantee urban safety for citizens, combat crime and repress public disorder<sup>69</sup>.

In this context, characterized by constraining policies, the local initiatives in favour of the participation of migrants have also given up. Between the end of the '90s and the beginning of 2000 the regional, provincial and municipal governments tried to involve migrants in some forms of political participation, but their attempts failed. These will be examined more fully in the following paragraph.

#### **4.2. The local contexts: some experiences of political participation**

Since new rules on immigrants' political participation have not been introduced at the national level, some initiatives have been organized at local level. Apart from the Immigration Territorial Councils, some Regions and Municipalities have modified their Statutes autonomously to give migrants the right to vote. They justified their actions based on various documents, e.g. the Law on the statutes of local administrations – legislative decree 267/2000) which gives local administrations more autonomy in several ways, including political participation; Chapter B of the Strasburg Convention, which recommends creating consultative and representative bodies for non-European immigrants; the European Paper of rights of human beings in cities, which extends the right to vote to all individuals who are over eighteen and have been resident in the city for 2 years.

Nevertheless, the modifications introduced by Regions and Municipalities were rejected by the State Council which declared that national institutions rather than local bodies should cover the issue of voting rights. After a long political debate, many local administrations bypassed the issue by setting up two types of bodies in order to favour the political participation of migrants: the Municipal Consultative Bodies (*Consulte comunali*) (which are made up of Italians and immigrants) and the Additional Foreign Councillor (*Consigliere straniero aggiunto*). These bodies are consultative: the representatives of the immigrants can participate in local administrative meetings and give opinions about immigration issues, but they cannot legislate or vote at these meetings. The immigrant members of these bodies in general are not elected but are chosen from the migrants' associations, so they are not completely representative<sup>70</sup>. They also lack economic resources and they can only intervene on immigration issues (Attanasio, Facchini 2004; Asgi, Fieri 2005; Carpo et al. 2003). Migrants often think that they are not well represented by these bodies and that they cannot influence local policies through them (Mantovan 2007); sometimes they are not even informed about the existence of these bodies (Kosic, Triandafyllidou 2005). Consequently, most Municipal Consultative bodies and Additional Foreign Councillors failed and were not set up again.

Many Municipalities continued to challenge the judgments of the State Council and modified their statutes, introducing the right to vote for non EU nationals in District Councils, Circuit Councils and Local Consultative Referenda. Of course, these kinds of participation are not as effective as the right to vote and, as Martiniello said (1999), they cannot be considered as substitutes for it.

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<sup>69</sup> The main areas of intervention were prostitution, alcohol abuse, vandalism and begging. For a fuller description of these local policies see par. 1.4.

<sup>70</sup> In the last few years some Municipalities (e.g. Rome) have introduced the rule to elect immigrant members, letting immigrants vote for their candidates. Nevertheless, immigrants do not often vote, because they do not believe in the power of these bodies to influence the decisions of local administrations (Attanasio, Facchini, 2004).



Waiting for sweeping changes in law, immigrants find other forms of participation in the social and public life, i.e. ethnic associations and trade unions.

#### **4.3. The role of immigrant associations and trade unions**

A widespread form of social participation occurs through immigrant associations. Nevertheless, these associations were created by immigrants firstly to satisfy cultural, social and religious needs, to promote the cultural identity of their members and to sustain their integration. It was only later that they became contexts of political demands, and this change of direction takes place with difficulty, and usually thanks to the support of Italian organizations (Carpo et al. 2003; Meli, Enwereuzor 2003; Caselli, Grandi 2010, 2011).

Immigrant associations offer a context in which to meet, to exchange information, to socialize, to share customs and (religious) rituals. They are usually formed by migrants of the same ethnic and/or national origins, they are locally organized and they operate only in their municipalities (Caselli, Grandi 2011; Kosic, Triandafyllidou 2005). They have few and only occasional relations with Italian institutions and they lack a framework of institutionalization and public support (Caselli 2008). Their participation in the public arena is possible only through the intermediation of Italian associations and organizations, i.e. no-profit and voluntary organizations: they collaborate with trade unions or Catholic organizations (e.g. parish recreation centres,) and sometimes with local administrations (Caselli, Grandi 2011).

Besides the fact that immigrant associations do not have any social visibility, they also have intrinsic problems. Indeed, they do not often have economic and financial resources, they do not have anywhere to meet, or any time to organize the activities (Carpo et al. 2003). For all these reasons the associations are fragile and vulnerable, and they easily end up closing down.

Because of the vulnerability and fragmentation of immigrant associations, it is also difficult to know how many there are and what their activities are. There are very few qualitative and quantitative studies, but some of them have tried to collect information about their numbers, characteristics and activities (CNEL 2001; Caselli, Grandi 2010, 2011). According to CNEL (2001), there were 893 immigrant associations in Italy in 2001. They were concentrated in the northern regions and a large number of them were mono-ethnic (61%). Multiethnic associations (formed by people of different ethnic groups) represented 25.6% of the total and interethnic associations (those involving both Italians and immigrants) represented only 14.5%. Caselli and Grandi (2010, 2011) also collected information about immigrant associations in the Lombardy region. In 2010 there were 304 immigrant associations, 50.2% of which were mono-ethnic, 25.4% of which consisted of members with mainly the same nationality, while in 24.4% of cases there was no majority nationality.

Although immigrant associations are still fragile and immature, their political participation (e.g. as advocacy groups, because they can not participate formally due to the legislation) is often promoted and sustained by Italian institutions. Indeed these Italian actors look for an interlocutor to represent migrants, since migrants are not entitled to vote or express their political ideas. Therefore, immigrant associations are supported because of the need of Italian actors to have immigrant counterparts (Mantovan, 2007).

One specific case of the participation of immigrant associations is that of co-development projects: Italian NGOs often involve immigrant associations in tenders for co-development projects, strengthen relationships with them and promote immigrant associations in public contexts. Nevertheless, the participation of immigrants is mediated by Italian institutions: instead of becoming

actors in the co-development projects, they actually become co-beneficiaries of the projects' funding and initiatives (Ambrosini, forthcoming).

The most important means of participating in public life for immigrants is through trade unions, followed by no-profit and voluntary organizations. But, while in the case of co-development projects Italian NGOs and immigrant associations cooperate, in this case the Italian organizations exercise advocacy in favour of migrants and defend their rights.

Trade unions began their pro-immigrant activities first, e.g. assistance and the legal protection, together with Catholic charities. Unlike the trade unions of other European countries whose aim was to firstly defend national workers (Carpo et al. 2003, Marino 2012), from the beginning, Italian trade unions<sup>71</sup> welcomed and protected immigrant workers in the same way they did for Italian workers, irrespective of their legal status (Meli, Enwereuzor 2003). Indeed, they offered them special services to facilitate their regularization as workers and their access to social services (Mottura, Pinto 1996; Zincone 1999b). CGIL and CISL also created ad hoc departments for immigrants.

As time went by, immigrant workers began not only to turn to trade unions to receive support, but they also joined them. In 2000, there were 223.632 immigrants joined trade unions (Caritas Migrantes 2002), in 2010 there were 1.137.238 (7.8% of all trade union members – Caritas Migrantes 2011).

Today immigrants have not only joined trade unions, but they also hold elected positions within them (Meli, Enwereuzor 2003; Kotic, Triandafyllidou 2005). The Caritas Migrantes report (2002) found that in CGIL there were foreign worker representatives in five categories (construction industry, chemicals, mechanical engineering, food industry and trade), in CISL and UIL there were immigrants in trade union committees at local, regional and national level. Nevertheless, there are few in managerial positions and also few who work for and within trade unions (Boccagni, forthcoming).

Immigrants, therefore, can express their interests and defend their rights through trade unions, NGOs and Catholic organizations, whereas their own associations are not visible and do not have strong political power<sup>72</sup>. Minority agencies are weak in Italian political life, and immigrants have little opportunity to make claims. Besides the fact that there are institutional obstacles to the participation in political life (i.e. the citizenship law), Italian society's and political approaches to immigration are still based on the concept of immigrants as strangers, and in the best case as useful workers, or - in the worst case – as invaders. For this reason they can have a few political rights, whereas their participation in politics is seen by some as being an issue of little relevance, a threat to national sovereignty by others.

However, Italian organizations have mostly paid attention to the defence of the weak, overlooking the issue of the political participation of immigrants. Moreover, their advocacy for immigrants has become even more important in the last few years because of "local policies of exclusion".

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<sup>71</sup> We are referring particularly to the three largest Trade Unions: CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour - *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*), CISL (Italian Confederation of Workers - *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*), and UIL (Italian Workers Union - *Unione Italiana del Lavoro*).

<sup>72</sup> It is only recently that immigrants have organized public protests and demonstrations to defend their rights autonomously, e.g. the strike on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010. After this strike, they organized other strikes but they did not receive the support of trade unions, maybe because the strikes had been organized autonomously by immigrants.

#### **4.4. Local policies of exclusion**

Local policies are usually seen as positive measures that city governments adopt to provide benefits for immigrants (CLIP 2010, UNESCO 2010). They often compensate for the limitations and shortcomings of national policies, offering useful resources and services for immigrant integration. Housing policies, assistance to families in difficulty, employment services are usually provided at the local level.

In Italy in the last few years many local policies have been introduced to guarantee urban safety, an issue which has become important in all European countries since '90 (Cittalia 2009). Their aim is apparently to protect general interests (e.g. urban standards, compromised by the presence of annoying beggars), and to suppress any behaviour that is considered annoying, indecent or ill-mannered. Nevertheless, many of these limit immigrants' rights indirectly or directly and favour their exclusion. Examples include any kind of gathering in urban places (e.g. the game of cricket in public parks, eating in parks), or the custom of praying in rooms which are not used specifically for this purpose (a common practice among Muslims who do not have formal and recognised places of worship). These have been the reasons for regulations introduced by mayors of many Italian cities, especially in the north where the political power of the Northern League is strong.

Therefore, "local policies of exclusion" can be defined as those measures, adopted by local authorities, that aim to exclude migrants, to separate them from the native component of the population by establishing specific, albeit implicit, prohibitions against them and which may be indirect or hidden, and which set up special screening procedures or limit their access to benefits and local social policy resources. These policies form the boundaries of legitimate local community, reinforcing a duality between the rightful members (the insiders, coinciding with the native people or otherwise of Italian nationality) and outsiders, whose right to residence tends to be redefined in more limited and conditional forms. They reassure natives about the priority of their status compared to that of outsiders, and send out the message that they are actively defended from the "invasion" of their urban space, in which they feel threatened.

The local policies of exclusion became particularly frequent in 2008, when the introduction of the Security Package gave more power to city mayors on the issue of urban safety. Nevertheless, they provoked reactions from various civil society actors, who opposed them not only with public protests but also with legal action.

Opposition came from above and below. From above, the UNAR (National Office against racial discrimination) exercises the right to carry out checks. It intervenes in the most flagrant cases of local measures which are discriminatory, and it can ask for the removal or the revision of such measures. From the bottom, the advocacy coalition of pro-immigrant social forces comes into play, which gives rise to protest initiatives and legal battles, often producing positive results, e.g. by the Avvocati per niente Association (Association of Pro-Bono Lawyers)<sup>73</sup>. Of course, the introduction of these measures, and the ensuing debates and protests are accompanied by media outcry and are designed to attract the attention of public opinion.

The regulations introduced by mayors and the discourses used by them and by the various civil society actors, institutions and mass media are interesting to be analyze in order to understand how the frames of exclusion and intolerance are constructed and justified in the public arena. It is interesting to highlight how local administrations draw the boundaries between Italians, who are

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<sup>73</sup> The association was founded in 2004, and its aim is to guarantee justice for the weak. It was promoted by Caritas and supported by some organizations of the third sector (i.e. the Christian Associations of the Italian Workers, Trade Unions). It now collaborates with these associations and defends the rights of people free of charge. The aim is not only to defend the weak legally, but also to make governments focus on social problems and elaborate better policies.

considered the rightful members of the local community, and outsiders (the immigrants) whose rights are limited; how they try to defend the supposed correctness of their initiatives and justify them; finally how those who fight against these policies (like the Association *Avvocati per niente*) construct their discourse strategies to demonstrate the discriminatory nature of these policies.

The analysis of “local policies of exclusion” is particularly significant because they are “institutionalized forms of intolerance”: they are drawn up and enforced by legitimate bodies (i.e. the Municipalities), which are elected democratically and which influence social life within the local communities. They are institutional obstacles to several rights of minorities (civil, social) and to their freedom of expressing their cultural and religious identity. They aim to oppose cultural and religious pluralism either directly (e.g. ban on wearing the burqa, the niqab or other veils that hide the face in public places; restrictive rules for the opening of places of worship) or indirectly (banning activities that might not be related to cultural aspects, but actually are<sup>74</sup>).

These institutional limitations of immigrants’ rights, called “local policies of exclusion”, will be investigated. Specifically, we will analyze how exclusion and intolerance contained in local policies are justified within the institutional and legal frame, and how city mayors represent these measures, trying to hide or to justify the discriminatory nature of them in their discourses and measures<sup>75</sup>. We will also pay attention to the frames used by those who fight against these measures, and finally we will analyse the discourses used by mass media to describe these issues and attract the attention of the public.

#### 4.5. Methodology

This report is based on desk research and fieldwork. In terms of desk research we collected many kinds of documents, such as statistical data, policy documents and journal articles. We examined languages, words, discourses, types of statistical data and sources used in various documents: the texts of the policies, the articles published in newspapers, the declarations of mayors, the judgements of the courts, the laws and the law-decrees, which were analyzed by qualitative discourse analysis (Wodak et al., 1999, Wodak and Meyer 2001, Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2008). The aim was to collect frames and discourses of the social actors involved in the processes regarding the local policies of exclusion. This phase started at the beginning of the research and ran in parallel to the fieldwork.

The fieldwork was based on qualitative interviews and conducted between October 2011 and January 2012 in the metropolitan areas of Milan and Brescia (another province in the Lombardy region, where many local policies were enacted by small or medium size municipalities). More specifically, we conducted 15 semi-structured qualitative interviews with people of different backgrounds: 4 lawyers, 4 members of trade unions, 4 members of no-profit associations, a member of the opposition within a municipality, a Regional councillor of the Northern League Party in Lombardy and finally a City councillor of the previous administration in Milan (centre-right).

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<sup>74</sup> A case in point is the prohibition of team games and other activities in public parks in Brescia. The actual aim of the regulation was to suppress an activity that is very popular among Pakistani and Indians, the game of cricket, which was played frequently by them in parks.

<sup>75</sup> The “local policies of exclusion” are mostly by-laws or ordinances. An ordinance is a decree formulated directly by the mayor. More generally, by-laws are rules formulated by the mayor in the Municipal Council (which consists of people chosen by the mayor) and then come into force. They are usually introduced in response to local problems, e.g. parking, control of activities (e.g. drinking in parks, begging). But “local policies of exclusion” are also regional laws or municipal regulations, in general all those measures which exclude migrants (for a definition see par. 4.4).

Some of them were contacted because they were directly involved in the processes regarding the local policies of exclusion, like the members of trade unions or the two lawyers who fought against these measures in courts. Others were contacted through a snow-ball technique, by asking the previous interviewees if/which civil society actors were involved in the issues. We did not interview people of foreign origin, because during the fieldwork we found that they did not participate in the processes regarding the local policies of exclusion. As previous research has highlighted, immigrant associations are cultural, social or religious associations, they have weak political roles (also because of structural reasons) and they are often not officially recognised. Trade unions and no-profit associations act on their behalf.

We did not even interview mayors who enacted the measures, because of the difficulty in contacting and meeting them. Nevertheless, we managed to interview two politicians, one from the Northern League and the second from PDL (the right wing party whose President is Berlusconi) who were in favour of these regulations and supported their introduction. We also collected a lot of data about reasons and frames of those who promoted the policies of exclusion by analyzing documents and the declarations of mayors and politicians published in newspapers and on websites.

The interviews were usually conducted in the offices of the subjects. The member of the opposition was interviewed in his house, and a member of an association in a bar. They were conducted in Italian, audio-recorded and then transcribed. The interview guide used for the interviews as well as the list of interviewers can be found in the appendix to this report.

#### **4.6. The political challenge: the birth of the local policies of exclusion**

The local policies of exclusion became particularly frequent in 2008, after the introduction of new laws on urban safety (law n. 125/2008 and Ministry Decree 5<sup>th</sup> August 2008). These new laws, which are part of the so-called Security Package, gave more power to mayors: they managed to autonomously introduce interventions in order to guarantee urban safety. The strengthening of the mayors' power was met with widespread concern among the civil society<sup>76</sup>: respecting the rules about peaceful coexistence and about urban decency. One of the most important changes that the laws introduced was the possibility to approve by-laws<sup>77</sup> even though they were not pressing or urgent. This allowed mayors to adopt measures on urban safety very freely, without any form of mediation with other political actors<sup>78</sup>.

After the introduction of the laws, many mayors began to formulate and apply new rules on many issues: the consumption of alcoholic drinks (which was banned at certain times of the day, or for people under 16 years old), prostitution (not the phenomenon itself but some activities related to it, i.e. obstructing roads or wearing indecent clothing), selling food and drinks at certain times (which can be a breach of the peace), begging, the use of public property without respecting public decency and

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<sup>76</sup> These concerns are common throughout all European countries, as are the issues of terrorism or climate change, but in Italy the issue of security is particularly emphasized. According to research (Valtolina 2010, Diamanti 2011), among all European countries, Italy has the greatest concerns about security, and this is linked to the presence of immigrants, who are seen as a threat to security.

<sup>77</sup> For a definition of a by-law see note 75.

<sup>78</sup> Mayors can also adopt measures regarding welfare, but in this case interventions are adopted democratically within the City Council. It is worth noting here that the mayors are supported by the majority in the City Council, so their proposals are usually approved. It is interesting to highlight that a democratic method (i.e. voting within the City Council) is used to apply non-democratic measures.

hygiene (i.e. more than three people sitting on benches, or lying on the grass in parks), illegal camping<sup>79</sup>.

A study conducted by Cittalia (2009) and Anci shows that more than half of these local regulations were introduced from August to November 2008, they decreased until May 2009 and then they increased again until July 2009. In this period, 788 by-laws were introduced in 5.5% of all local Italian administrations. A second study by Cittalia (2012) shows that in 2009-2010 the trend continued: 500 local regulations were introduced in 2.7% of all local Italian administrations.

Although they were implemented in only a few municipalities, in 2009-2010 (but also in the previous years) they were concentrated in the northern regions (43.3% in the north-west, 24.2% in the north-east). Some were introduced in the south (12% in 2008-2009, 8.9% in 2009-2010) and in the central regions (15.9% in 2008-2009, 11% in 2009-2010). The Lombardy region (in the north) in particular stood out for its high concentration of by-laws. Lombardy is the most populous and wealthy Italian region, and one that receives the largest number of foreign immigrants; it is also a region where the power of the Northern League used to be very strong. Here, 120 local policies were introduced in 2009-2010 in 3.8% of all municipalities in the region. Piedmont (in the north-west, close to Lombardy) is the second region with the largest number of local regulations (56 in 1.6% of all local administrations of the region), followed by Veneto (52 – in the north-east) and Emilia-Romagna<sup>80</sup> (in the centre of Italy, close to Lombardy), which has adopted fewer local regulations than the other three regions but in the largest number of municipalities (in 6.3% of all local administrations of the region, represented in blue in the map).

Most of the Municipalities which used the power given to them by law 125/2008 were governed by centre-right administrations, and the mayor was usually a politician of the Northern League Party. These measures came into effect in the local context, sometimes in specific areas of the municipality (e.g. in some parks or near schools) or in some time slots (e.g. at night). Some of them involved the whole population of the municipality, while others affected only a part of it (e.g. owners of food and beverage shops). Although these regulations were effective only in the municipality where they were introduced, they produced effects and resonance on a wider level: they caused political debates, they sometimes involved the Ministry of The Interior or the National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR), they were discussed in the mass media and finally they were examined by courts. We will analyze these aspects later.

The most interesting thing to highlight here is that the local policies of exclusion directly or indirectly targeted immigrants: in some cases they affected only those who were the poorest or the most disorderly component of the foreign population (e.g. the ban on begging, the repression of irregular immigration by reinforcing controls), in other cases they affected those who believe in a different religion (e.g. restrictions on the definition of places of worship, a ban on wearing the burqa), or those who have a business (e.g. the obligation to have two toilets in phone centres, a ban on opening new kebab shops in the city centre). In some cases the intention to target minorities was openly declared (e.g. the ban on building new mosques), in other cases they were justified by the necessity to preserve urban security and decorum (e.g. the ban on drinking in public places).

Because they targeted immigrants and the weaker members of the population, there were reactions from many civil society actors who opposed the measures not only with public protests (interviews, press releases, demonstrations, information packs) but also with legal action.

The various by-laws became therefore some of the most debated issues on a political level, in the local and national mass media.

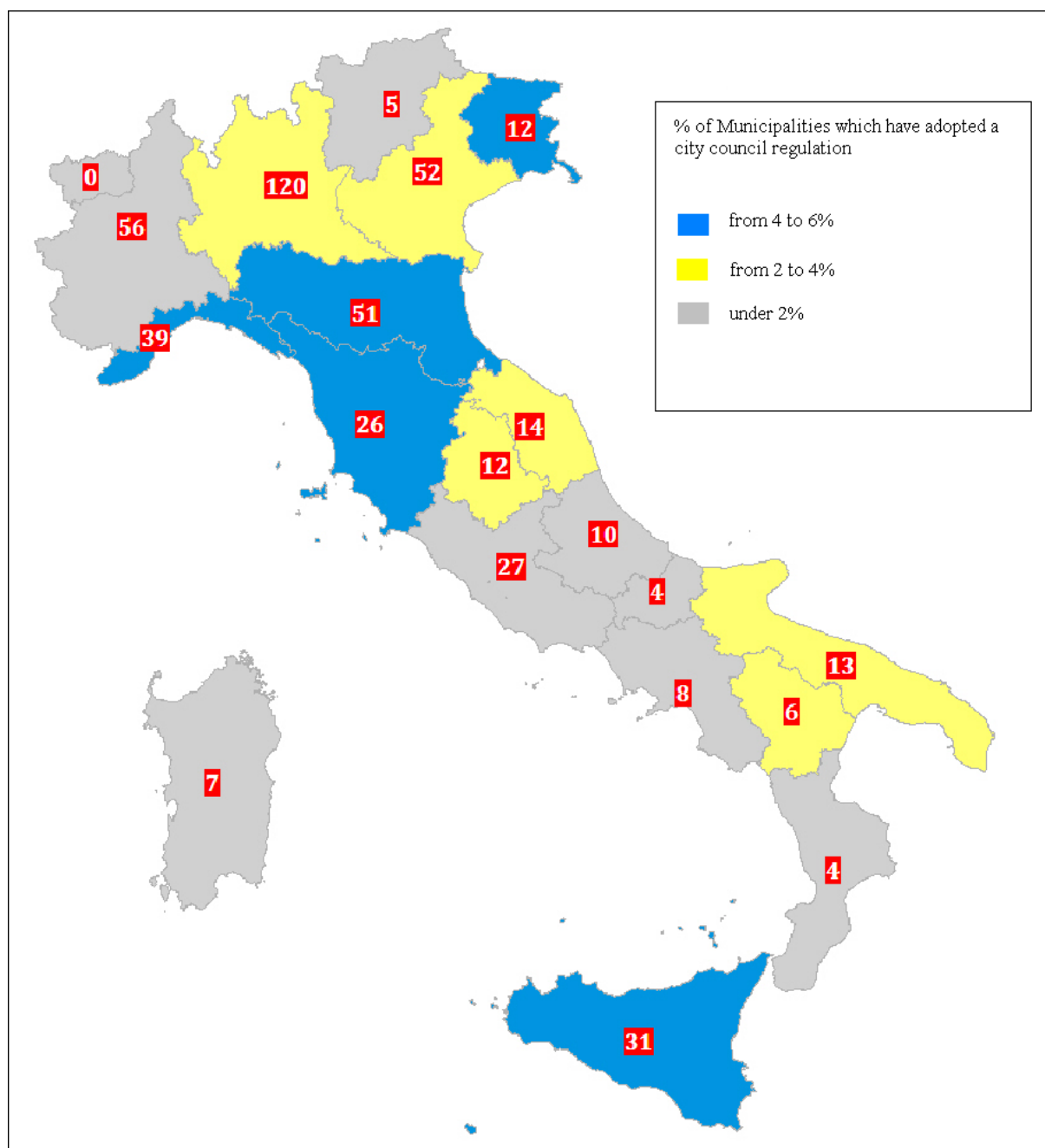
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<sup>79</sup> For a detailed classification of the by-laws see Ambrosini (2012).

<sup>80</sup> It is interesting to highlight here that Emilia Romagna is traditionally a left-wing region.



**Table. 1. Municipalities which have adopted at least one by-law/for Region, 2009-2010 years.**





#### 4.6.1. Processes and actors involved in the local policies of exclusion

The main actors involved in the local policies of exclusion were the mayors of those municipalities where these regulations were introduced, and the civil society actors who fought against them, usually trade unions and the Associazione Avvocati per Niente (transl.: Association of Pro-Bono lawyers<sup>81</sup>). This is the case in the Lombardy region, whereas in other regions (like Veneto, in the north-east of Italy) the lawyer members of the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI)<sup>82</sup> participated in the trials against the mayors. Among the trade unions, the largest, CGIL and CISL, were the main actors involved.

It is worth noting here that the local policies of exclusion comprehended not only those measures on urban security and decency introduced as a result of the Security Package, but also other measures adopted by mayors<sup>83</sup> in order to exclude migrants (e.g. special screening procedures or limits to access to social resources, or financial aid only for Italians). For this reason some civil society actors fought against them in courts.

Trade unions and the Associazione Avvocati per Niente usually found that a local policies of exclusion had been introduced in three ways: 1) they frequently checked and supervised the municipalities' activities<sup>84</sup>, 2) they followed up a complaint made by people who thought they had been discriminated against by these measures, 3) they responded to reports from citizens, volunteers, and local trade union representatives. After verifying that a local policy was actually discriminatory, trade unions, in collaboration with the Associazione Avvocati per Niente sent a warning to the municipality, and also to UNAR and to the Prefetto<sup>85</sup>, in order to ask for their opinion. If the municipality did not answer, there followed a reminder, after which trade unions and lawyers prosecuted the municipality. Some municipalities reacted by eliminating the measure the day before the trial or on the same day, while others tried to fight the case in court and, if they lost, they appealed once or more. Others reintroduced the measure after modified it based on the court's judgement but actually succeeded in bypassing it<sup>86</sup>. The judgement in fact consisted of eliminating the policy or modifying it, e.g. by including among the beneficiaries of a social service those who had been

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<sup>81</sup> See note 12 for information on the Association of Pro-Bono Lawyers.

<sup>82</sup> ASGI was established in 1990 and is made up of lawyers, academics, and legal practitioners with a particular professional interest in legal issues relating to immigration. They defend immigrants' rights free of charge.

<sup>83</sup> More power to local administrations had already been given by a previous reform, i.e. the legislative decree 267/2000.

<sup>84</sup> A case in point is the CGIL of Brescia, where there is a person whose job is to supervise the activities of the municipalities around Brescia every day.

<sup>85</sup> In the Italian legislation system, the Prefetto is an officer who represents the national government within the Province and supervises the activities of local administrations. The Prefetto is in charge of the Territorial Office of the Government and is answerable to the Ministry of the Interior. Among his tasks he has to guarantee public order and security.

<sup>86</sup> For example in the Tradate municipality a by-law was introduced to pay out an amount of money for new babies born to Italian parents who had been resident in the city for 5 years. After the judgment, the municipality eliminated the requirement of Italian citizenship, but then declared that there was no more money for new babies, so it did not give funding to either Italians or immigrants. In Brescia the "bonus for babies" was also not given to anyone, including Italians, after the judgement which condemned the by-law. By eliminating the bonus for all families, the local governments helped spread resentment towards immigrants. But in 2011 the Municipality was again condemned because of the withdrawal of the bonus for all families and it was ordered by the court to re-establish it.

previously excluded. The municipality was usually ordered to pay all legal costs and sometimes to publish the verdict in a local or national newspaper.

It is interesting to highlight that the social actors involved in all the trials were always the same, i.e. trade unions and lawyers who collaborated with them. These subjects often try to involve other institutions, such as UNAR or the Prefetto. An interviewee who is a member of the CGIL of Brescia<sup>87</sup> described the roles of UNAR and of the Civil Government as follows:

“There are two authorities with whom we can verify the possibility of a legal action: one is the UNAR, the other is the Prefetto, which must be the institution that ensures and supervises by-laws. It should. The prefectures sent letters to the municipalities in order to review their by-laws, but they have started doing this only recently, in the last few months. While the UNAR, I must say, every time we asked for an opinion they sent it to us...sometimes delaying sending a reply when it was a political issue, but not only in this case. But, overall it's the only tool we have. So, in terms of appropriateness, you should ask him” (BM, member of CGIL Brescia and of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition).

The European Union asked the member states to create bodies to guarantee equal treatment for people of all racial and ethnic origins in each country (Council directive 2000/43/CE). Italy founded UNAR, but this body can only give opinions and it does not deal with legal action in defence of people who have been discriminated against (Strazzari, 2010). Its lack of power depends on the fact that it is not an independent body, as BM said:

“UNAR has been founded within the Prime Minister's Office. It is already an anomaly. It should be an impartial body, as in all other countries, an independent body that oversees discrimination issues involving citizens at all levels. So in the other countries it is a third and separate body whereas here it is government-based, it is a body that is actually incorporated into the government” (BM, member of CGIL Brescia and of no-profit association, advocacy coalition).

At the same time, the Ministry of the Interior did not intervene in the local policies of exclusion, even though trade unions sometimes tried to get it involved. BM affirmed that the Ministry declared that it was not involved in the administrative activities of municipalities<sup>88</sup>. Generally, the national government did not intervene in the local policies of exclusion, based on the consideration that certain issues can (and should) be dealt with by local governments, thanks to the legislative decree 267/2000 (which gave more power to local administrations) and the Security Package of 2008-2009. Some members of the national government or of the Parliament intervened by only giving their opinion about some regulations, probably to give great political resonance to a particular issue and to attract the attention (and consensus or opposition) of the public.

With the exception of these declarations by politicians, many issues regarding the inclusion/exclusion of immigrants (e.g. the ban on wearing the burqa or niqab) have not yet been thoroughly discussed at the national level.

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<sup>87</sup> The interviewee is also part of a no-profit association whose aim is to defend human beings' rights and to promote solidarity among people. The Association is part of the advocacy coalition that fights against the local policies of exclusion.

<sup>88</sup> Indeed, when most by-laws were introduced, the Ministry of The Interior was Maroni, a member of the Northern League, who also supported these policies of exclusion.

The CGIL of Brescia also tried to involve the European Commission, especially as regards those discriminations contained in policies that were considered particularly serious. In these cases the European Commission can open an infringement procedure and sanction the states. Nevertheless, the process is very long and the CGIL of Brescia is still waiting for an answer from the European Commission.

As regards immigrant associations, they were absent in these processes. CF, a member of the no-profit association Arci<sup>89</sup>, said that in Milan there are many groups, many little associations which are not well organized or officially recognised. As a consequence, they have no power to act and they rely on Italian no-profit associations, like Arci. These Italian associations become the link between immigrants and Italian institutions.

The opposition political parties also claim to have no power: the by-laws are formulated by the mayor in the Municipal Council (which consists of people chosen by the mayor) and then come into force. They are not voted on in the City Council. As a consequence, it is impossible for the opposition in the City Council to oppose the measures.

In many interviewees' opinions, the opposition did not strongly oppose the proposals, because the themes of urban security and immigration were two sensitive issues: there is the risk that the opposition will assume unpopular positions with the electorate. By contrast, a politician from the opposition in Tradate said that his party decided not to oppose drastically because it did not want the issue to become only political:

“There was a big risk in bringing the issue into political discussion, i.e. to provoke a closure from the other parties; it could become “you did it for political reasons”. Both I and my political group for which I was the coordinator were not interested in making a political battle in order to collect votes...well, I don't know how many votes you can collect in these little contexts...but it was not important. The important thing was to do the right thing and do it in order to communicate the message. The message was that we need to think about what being a citizen means, about the fact that immigration cannot be considered only when we talk about the labour market. The message was that living together should be built up day by day, without discrimination, because there is the stereotype that immigration is synonymous with illegality” (RM, City Councillor of the opposition - Democratic Party- in Tradate's municipality).

Because the opposition decided not to intervene, RM tried to involve the local no-profit associations, in order to mobilise the civil society and fight against the so-called “bonus for babies” by-law<sup>90</sup>. Some Italian citizens, therefore, participated in the process. Nevertheless, they encountered many difficulties. In fact, when they tried to collect signatures to petition against the by-law, many people and associations which had previously been willing to sign and participate, withdrew from the initiative. A citizen who was part of a Catholic no-profit association and participated in collecting signatures explained the matter as follows:

“While I was talking with the no-profit associations some concerns emerged, some fear...in Tradate the Northern League means power, economic power, political power, power from all points of view. The Northern League has governed for many years...so the whole thing became difficult to face. But I said “let's set up a spontaneous committee and organize a public meeting.

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<sup>89</sup> Arci is a no-profit association whose aim is to promote social cohesion, peace, and equal rights. It is part of the advocacy coalition that fights against the discriminatory measures targeting immigrants.

<sup>90</sup> See note 86 for more information about the contents of the by-law.

And in the public meeting we can ask citizens how they feel towards this ‘bonus for babies’....because Tradate’s citizens are Catholic!” (SE, member of a no-profit association in Tradate, advocacy coalition).

Even though the association encountered many difficulties<sup>91</sup>, it involved the Association of Pro-Bono lawyers and finally organized a public meeting to talk about the by-law and communicate their victory after the judgment.

In fact, whereas the by-law was discussed in the mass media and resulted in discussions among politicians and the public, the judgments were not often released adequately and people generally did not know how the trials had ended. But this is consistent with the aim of the local governments: they were mostly interested in spreading the message that citizens were protected against immigrants.

Similarly, the verdict of the Constitutional Court regarding the power of mayors on the issue of urban safety is not known at all by the public. In fact, after some years of legal battles among civil society actors and municipalities who enacted the by-laws, in April 2011 (judgment n. 115) the Constitutional Court specified that the by-laws are extraordinary tools to deal with urgent and pressing issues. They can be used only for extraordinary events, for emergencies, and for a limited period of time. So, the mayors did not manage to introduce any by-laws on the issue of urban security and public decorum, unless they were pressing and urgent<sup>92</sup>.

Nevertheless, in the last few months the municipalities have adopted new strategies to reach their aims, while avoiding indictment. For example, they produced internal guidelines for their administrative staff, took ordinary measures (e.g. modification of urban planning in order to remove Roma camps), modified the city police regulations<sup>93</sup> or introduced new trading rules. In this way they reached the same aims as those of the by-laws: they adopted discriminatory measures without introducing by-laws but simply by modifying internal guidelines. Besides the fact that in this way they can not be indicted, they can also hide the discriminatory acts more easily. As SA, a member of Brescia’s CGIL said:

“The approach is not to introduce by-laws but to introduce internal guidelines, which are much more difficult to obtain. They make police regulations, the tool is different. Some of the more daring municipalities pass resolutions about adopting guidelines, e.g. “in order to be registered in the Registry office it is necessary to do this”. So, there is no longer a unilateral act of the mayor, it changed a year ago. Why? The by-laws are condemned, whereas internal guidelines are measures where I, as the head of your department, as the mayor, tell you, who are my representatives at the Registry office, that you have to do things this way to register someone with the Registry office. It is often an internal letter, it is not easy to obtain it, you cannot find it on the Council Notice Board. So, either you have a personal contact inside the municipality or there is a person who tells you “they refused to register me”, so you try to understand, you try to reconstruct everything. I repeat, it is not easy to obtain these measures” (SA, member of CGIL Brescia, and of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition).

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<sup>91</sup> Opposition came from the same association and from people linked to other Catholic groups. SE supposed that they received threats of cutting funding from the municipality, and for this reason they decided not to expose themselves.

<sup>92</sup> But they can introduce other kinds of measures in order to achieve the same aims, i.e. to exclude migrants (e.g. the so-called “bonus for babies”).

<sup>93</sup> The modifications to police regulations are discussed and voted on in the City Council. When they are approved they introduce a long-term change.

Even though the Constitutional Court introduced judgement n. 115/2011 and the municipalities lost the legal battles, some political actors still continue in their attempt to discriminate against immigrants and to create boundaries between Italians and immigrants. The frames used to justify their intentions and actions will be the subject of the following paragraph.

#### ***4.6.2. The aims of local policies of exclusion: frames of mayors and local politicians***

##### **Frame 1: urban security**

Analyzing the content of the local administrations' policies and their statements to the mass media, the main reason for these regulations was to guarantee urban safety, protect urban decency and preserve the hygienic conditions of the cities. The mayor of Gavardo, a little city in the Lombardy region, introduced a city council regulation which ordered checks on the condition of houses every time someone changed their address. Within the by-law there was a list of the city centre streets to be checked, where the most of the immigrants lived. The mayor declared that his by-law was:

“aimed at the preservation of public and environmental health...We believe that the best way to defuse the risks caused by the excessive concentration of immigrants is to make sure that they find accommodation in other areas of Gavardo” (Giornale di Brescia, 22 April 2010).

The mayor seemed to declare that in order to protect public health it is necessary to avoid the concentration of immigrants in specific areas of the city, as if to say that immigrants cause diseases and urban decay. This is a classic rhetorical strategy, i.e. creating two categories, the ‘clean’ and the ‘dirty’ people, the “true citizens” and the outsiders: the aim is to separate immigrants from natives, to distinguish between ‘us’ and ‘them’<sup>94</sup>.

The mayor of Calcinato, another small city in Lombardy, claimed that, in order to guarantee public hygiene, it was necessary to establish criteria to let immigrants register with the Registry office. Her by-law stated that those who wanted to register had to prove they earned the minimum wage. She said:

“imposing criteria to register with the Registry office and guarantee a decent standard for the houses is becoming a necessity because of a sizeable flux of immigrants” (Bresciaoggi, 1 April 2010).

In the mayor's opinion the large number of immigrants was linked to low standards, so it was necessary to take certain steps. The principal (though not always declared) aim was to discourage the arrival of poor families which consequently weigh on the local public services. Besides that, another common frame was used: “immigrants are too many in number, their number has increased too quickly in only a few years, and in an uncontrolled way”. Another aim was therefore to spread among the public the idea that an invasion of immigrants had occurred.

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<sup>94</sup> Moreover, this rhetorical strategy is often used to represent Roma, who are usually described as dirty and dangerous.

In many mayors' opinions, urban security could (and should) be guaranteed by controlling the places of worship, banning the construction of mosques, and preventing Muslims from worshipping together. They stated that in the mosques there are many fundamentalist Muslims, who are therefore suspected of supporting terrorists. In Trenzano, a little city of about 5,600 inhabitants, the representative of an Islamic cultural association had asked the Municipality to recognise a place of worship but the Municipality refused to give him the permit. By contrast, the Municipality introduced a by-law which banned the opening of new mosques and Islamic cultural centres. The Municipal Councillor of Culture defined the issue of immigration and of Muslim communities as "complex problems" and said:

"The ban on the construction of mosques is an assumption of responsibility by those who govern the community in order to reassure the public. The issue of mosques is one of both urban planning and public security. The rules of the plans are not respected and the centres become centres of active proselytism and of fanatic religious-political propaganda over which no control is possible because the language spoken is unknown to most people including the police" (*Giornale di Brescia*, 16 December 2009).

The councillor does not quote the issue of religion per se as the main problem, but rather refers to the issue of respecting urban standards and the risk of attracting terrorists. Once again, the concerns regard control, public security and urban decorum. Like Trenzano, the Municipality of Brescia was worried about standards in the city, and to this end the Mayor introduced a by-law which banned the opening of new take-away restaurants in the city centre. A municipality councillor declared:

"we are facing an emergency related to local shops and decency, and avoiding the invasion of the centre is the right thing to do" (*Bresciaoggi*, 22 April 2010).

Invasion, public decorum, urban safety and public health are words which are usually used by the right-wing politicians to talk about immigration, to spread anxiety among the public and consequently to justify their by-laws.

The slogans used in their public discourses were powerful and hard-hitting. As NM (a Regional councillor of the Northern League) said, the aim was to attract the attention of the electorate. Nevertheless, the consequence of this strategy was that the Northern League party was (and still is) accused of being a xenophobic party. In NM's opinion, beneath these strong slogans there was a well-structured thought: the control of cities is necessary to favour integration. Unlike those who think that the Northern League is racist, the party is in favour of the integration of immigrants but only under certain conditions, i.e. immigrants have to respect Italian rules and laws:

"the concept of respect of the host country has to be present. So it is not a law that wants to assimilate the others to our values and our traditions, but a law that says: you can keep your traditions and your culture but you have to respect and know the culture of the country which hosts you. And so you have also to recognize those values that represent this society, because it is in any case a country that is hosting you. So, at least you have to know the Constitution, what the laws are, what the rules are. So this law fits into this logic" (NM, Regional councillor of the Northern League, promoter of the so-called "Harlem law"<sup>95</sup>).

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<sup>95</sup> The "Harlem law" is a Regional law proposed by some Regional councillors of the Northern League – including NM – and was introduced in February 2012. The aim is to regulate and check specific economic activities, i.e. massage parlours and

Regulations were introduced to control, regulate and make immigrants respect Italian laws.

## **Frame 2: necessity to be selective in welfare provisions**

A second frame the mayors use to justify the local policies of exclusion is the scarcity of resources, and consequently the necessity to be selective in allocating them. In their opinion the by-laws are necessary because there are very few economic resources to meet social demands. So access to social benefits has to be regulated and aid cannot be given to everybody, but the resources have to be set aside for Italians. The frame is: “First Italians, then immigrants”, i.e. “Italians have rights because they are citizens, whereas immigrants are guests, they are not part of our nation, so their rights are secondary to ours, or at the extreme they have no rights”. This is the case of Chiari, a little city in the Lombardy region, where a public competition was set up to award computers to the best students. But only students with Italian citizenship and who were registered in the Registry office of Chiari Municipality could participate in the competition. The by-law was brought to trial by some civil society actors with the support of the Association of Pro-Bono lawyers, and the court’s judgement ordered the Municipality to change or revoke the public competition. Despite this, the mayor continued to claim that he acted correctly:

“We don’t believe we were discriminatory...the no-profit associations which deal with immigration want all rights to be guaranteed for immigrants as they are for Italian citizens. Without considering that they are guests in another country” (Giornale di Brescia, 8 March 2010).

The idea of “immigrants as guests” is another very frequent frame among local administrators and administrative staff, and one which justifies the exclusion of immigrants from social benefits. In the case of Calcinato quoted above, in the opinion of a Regional councillor (a Northern-League politician) the city council regulation that required a minimum wage in order to register with the Registry office aimed:

“to regulate correctly and coherently each flow and every request for residence in order to ensure the effective availability of municipal services to those who actually have the right to them, based on effective and efficient management” (Bresciaoggi, 4 April 2011).

In the discourses of these social actors the most frequently used words are “rights, guests vs. citizens, efficient and effective management”. The declared aim was to guarantee efficiency, and give social benefits only - or giving priority - to Italian citizens.

## **Frame 3: defence of Italian identity and culture**

(Contd.) \_\_\_\_\_

food shops, imposing certain criteria, such as understanding the Italian language, the display of commercial information in Italian, the possession of a vocational qualification to open a massage parlour. In April 2012 the national government challenged the law at the Constitutional Court. The verdict is pending.

Finally, the third frame used by mayors to justify the policies of exclusion was based on the defence of Italian identity, history and culture. The clearest example is the so-called “anti-kebab regulations”, which were introduced into many Italian cities in the north (Brescia and Bergamo in the Lombardy region, or Bussolengo near Venice) and in the centre (the cities of Reggio Emilia, Prato, Lucca) of Italy. The core of these by-laws was to regulate the opening times of food shops (e.g. Brescia, Reggio Emilia); to ban the opening of new kebab shops (and also phone centres) in the city centre and near places of worship, hospitals and schools (Bussolengo); to ban non-traditional activities in the city centre (Prato); to ban the opening of new businesses “whose activity can be linked to different ethnic groups, in order to preserve the traditions related to foods and the architectural, structural, cultural, historical and decorative traditions” (resolution of the City Council of Lucca n. 12 on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2009).

In these by-laws it was clearly written that traditional foods have to be preserved, in contrast to the selling of kebabs, which are not a traditional food and which are considered unhealthy. This concept is expressed more radically by mayors and politicians in the mass media. As a local politician of the Northern League in Brescia declared on the local newspaper:

“The activities managed by immigrants are colonizing our suburbs, we have to stop this phenomenon in order to avoid entire neighbourhoods becoming places where Italian is the real foreign language” (*Il Brescia*, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2010).

In these cases the by-laws are justified because of the preservation of the Italian language, typical Italian foods, and Italian history. Contamination of and changes in Italian cities, culture, and habits are not permitted, whereas the by-laws are useful:

“in order to really protect the historical centres of the cities from the monopolising presence of ethnic activities which are not at all consistent with the history of our city” (*Bresciaoggi*, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010).

The necessity to preserve Italian culture and traditions from the “invasion” of immigrants is particularly intense in the case of living alongside Muslims. In this frame, Muslims are seen as a threat not only because they are perceived as being very different in terms of language, culture, religion and dress (i.e. the burqa) but also because their followers are considered religious fanatics. For these reasons the construction of mosques or places of worship has often been hindered by local and national governments. A case in point is the mosque of via Jenner in Milan, which was not a real mosque but a place where many Muslims met to pray. After a long debate the mosque was not formally recognised and was then closed. Even now the Milan Municipality has not yet found a final solution for giving a suitable place of worship to Muslims living in Milan. Another case in point is Trenzano, mentioned above, where a by-law which banned the opening of mosques and Islamic cultural centres was introduced. A politician of the Northern League who is also a member of the Senate declared:

“the roots of Italy are Christian: we don’t want any mosques in Trenzano” (*Giornale di Brescia*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2010).

and another politician of the Northern League:



"Neither in Trezzano nor around the North...we must defend our society and our culture if we do not want to be overwhelmed" (*Giornale di Brescia*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2010).

These two politicians participated in a demonstration against the Islamic cultural centre whose slogan was, significantly: "Trezzano padana, mai musulmana" (transl.: Trezzano of the Po Valley, will never be Muslim").

The necessity to defend Italian citizens, their identity and rights from immigrants, who are perceived as guests, is confirmed by an interviewee. SA was a City councillor during the centre-right administration of Milan (2006-2011) and he promoted stricter regulation and control of Islamic places of worship in the city. Even though he declared that he was not totally in favour of the by-laws, he also sustained the necessity "to guarantee security and respect of the constitutional principles of our culture and our tradition". In his opinion the most important thing is not to offend Italians:

"There is a problem of respect for the vast majority of the Italian population that was born and grew up in Italy and has a Christian culture. And the presence of a significant building, maybe with the minaret, or things like that, would have undoubtedly affected the sensitivity of the overwhelming majority of the population that have to be kept in mind...let's say that in a democracy the majority counts for something" (City councillor of PDL - centre-right party - in Milan from 2006 to 2011).

Even the construction of buildings which are architecturally different from most of the buildings is perceived as offensive for Italians. This difference, together with the religious differences, has to be controlled in order to preserve Italians' identity, culture and tradition.

In summary, there are three principal frames that the mayors and the politicians use. The first frame is guaranteeing urban security and decorum. This can be achieved by controlling immigrants: the hygiene standards of their houses and shops, their legal situations, their economic resources, their criminal records. The main words used in these discourses are: urban security, urban decency, invasion, and emergency. They use a typical and current frame: the idea that immigration is a danger and should be dealt with using emergency tools.

The second frame is the shortage of economic and social resources. The by-laws are necessary because they set out some conditions in order to have access to social benefits, e.g. being Italian citizens or being registered with the Registry office of a municipality for some years. The rationale is: because resources are scarce, Italians have the right to access social benefits, whereas immigrants have fewer rights because they are guests and they are not part of the Italian nation. Their rights are secondary to those of Italians, or at the extreme they have no rights at all. In this case the main aim is to defend a supposed priority of Italians, whose social rights have to be guaranteed prior to those of immigrants<sup>96</sup>.

Finally, the third frame is linked to the defence of Italian identity and culture. Immigrants are seen as a threat to Italian culture, traditions and values, and their customs pollute Italian cities. Exclusion takes on a more symbolic meaning linked to identity. The by-laws help to preserve Italian history and culture from the invasion of immigrants.

The three frames contribute to constructing and reinforcing the boundaries between "us" and "them", between the natives, who represent the civilised world, and the foreigners, who are seen as

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<sup>96</sup> This frame is, among the other things, particularly appreciated by the weakest component of the Italian population.

uncivilised and dangerous, because they threaten urban security and the Italian culture with their presence, their way of living and their customs.

Regardless of the frame used, these measures did not appeal to many civil society actors, who opposed them not only through public protest but also through legal action.

#### ***4.6.3. Opposition to the local policies of exclusion: frames of civil society actors***

The main social actors who opposed the local policies of exclusion were the two major Italian Trade Unions, i.e. CGIL and CISL, some organizations linked to trade unions such as the National Beyond the Borders Association (Associazione nazionale oltre le Frontiere) (ANOLF<sup>97</sup>), some no-profit organizations, the Caritas, the Associazione Avvocati per Niente (transl.: the Association of Pro-Bono Lawyers) and the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione, Asgi). But opposition was also made by some citizens and politicians, especially those who lived in the cities where the measures were introduced and who were directly involved in the consequences of these local policies. As mentioned previously, immigrant associations hardly intervened at all, but we suppose that this depends on their lack of power and representation, besides the fact that they are mostly cultural, social or religious associations<sup>98</sup>.

The most current frame used by these social actors was the discriminatory nature of these regulations. In the declaration in the mass media the words used by them to describe the by-laws are “xenophobic initiatives”, “racist acts”, “pure racism”, “apartheid climax” and the mayors are defined as “mayor sheriffs” (Bresciaoggi, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2011). One of the most active actors, the CGIL of Brescia, through its secretary stated the following:

“these by-laws are cases of shameful discrimination which produce tension, fights among the poor, unacceptable social exclusion in the territory. We are in a situation of systematic discrimination, in which inalienable rights are violated. We cannot tolerate this shame anymore” (l’Unità, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2010).

In the interviewees’ opinion, the aim of these measures was not only to discriminate against immigrants but also to obtain political consensus from the public. As a member of CISL said:

“During the electoral campaigns they play on this fear. Mistrust, fear of others, painting a black picture of them [immigrants] , just to bring out those instincts that are probably natural, which are inside all of us, which are about mistrust of those who arrive from another country. And they go against them with electoral posters, like “No gypsy cities” .They rely on that for electoral gain” (MC, member of CISL Milan, Department of Immigration Policies).

Besides the fact that the aim is only to obtain political consensus, the interviewees outlined that many of these by-laws were inapplicable:

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<sup>97</sup> ANOLF is a no-profit association linked to CISL. It was founded in 1989 and its aim is to promote an equal multiethnic society, and to fight against racism and discrimination.

<sup>98</sup> See paragraph 1.3 for more information on the role of immigrant associations in Italian society.

“My evaluation was quite disheartening. I saw a repressive attitude in those by-laws. From the technical point of view they were very badly written, cut and pasted one from another, with only political propaganda purposes, to obtain electoral consensus, because...in that period the most debated issue was urban safety [.....]. But some of them were also inapplicable...for example that by-law about begging: if one begs, he/she has to pay a 500 € fine...where does he/she find 500 €? It was demagogy. One did not realize that these measures were inapplicable, even in a concrete sense” (PI, member of Caritas, Immigration Office, Milan).

Because of their inapplicability, in some interviewees’ opinion the main aim was not to apply them concretely but to canvass, to attract citizens’ attention to an issue that could find consensus among the public. One citizen of Tradate, who is also a member of the City Council and of a left-wing party, summarised this concept very well:

“I remember the patrols...where did they do the patrols? I have never seen them. In Tradate nobody patrolled as a volunteer. They have made such a mess, they have made people notice them...so, it is more a thing of media coverage, to put together a certain electorate rather than to reach concrete results. I don’t think that the birth rate has increased in the last three years, I tell you frankly. I might go and see but I do not think it has increased<sup>99</sup>. I don’t think, you know, that where you could not eat kebabs or ice cream outside the food shops, people doesn’t really eat them...I see that people eat quite easily outside food shops and I don’t see any policemen fining anyone. So, I repeat, there is a media objective rather than a concrete aim” (RM, City Councillor of the opposition - Democratic Party - in Tradate’s municipality).

Apart from the short-term effects, i.e. gaining political consensus, the interviewees are worried about the long-term effects of these by-laws. CF, member of the no-profit association Arci, described the consequences of the by-laws and of the electoral propaganda of the right-wing parties in the last years:

“It is obvious that the previous government had a specific political agenda. Calderoli, Borghezio and Maroni<sup>100</sup> have a specific cultural and political theory, defining it as racist is a little...xenophobic. It is a political thought that has found confirmation, they were elected... And surely the Berlusconi-Northern League period legitimised anti-immigration, it gave political legitimacy to say things that previously people tried not to give legitimacy to. To say those things was certainly not a civilized thing to do. So they have legitimised them and have carried forward a political and cultural project that the Northern League continued to spread in its territories. It is a mechanism that is as old as the world, i.e. in a time of economic and identity crisis, people close up like a fortress, close up against the enemy, against the Others, against the invasion. I noticed that racism has become an almost founding element of relations. If you look at the news, there is an increase in racial tension...I don’t know if we can call it racism, it is just focusing hate on someone else” (CF, member of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition).

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<sup>99</sup> He is referring to the by-law introduced in Tradate which paid out an amount of money for new babies, as long as they were born to Italian parents who had been resident in Tradate for 5 years. The declared aim was to increase the birth rate of Italians.

<sup>100</sup> These are three politicians of the Northern League Party. Maroni was also the Minister of the Interior until the appointment of the technical government led by Monti.

An important issue that CF quoted is the creation of boundaries between “we” and “they”. The radicalisation of such a division can lead to conflict, as BM said:

“Faced with something no one knows, after all...faced with an attitude of suspicion which is continuously spread, and which creates social alarm and mistrust of others, even neighbours, and not necessarily foreigners...not only foreigners...and the fact that security issues are continually raised, but from a virtual point of view to make people to think it is an actual imminent problem, creates a sort of alarmism against everything that might cause problems...this means that, instead of educating people to live together and to negotiate possible conflict, it stirs up opposition, radicalizes fears, leads to actual social conflict” (BM, member of CGIL Brescia and of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition).

The boundaries between “we” and “they” were based on the distinction between citizens and guests (or no-citizens, cf. Cornelli 2010), the insiders and the outsiders, those who have rights because they are part of the nation-state and those who do not have rights (or have fewer rights) because they are foreigners. The policies of exclusion, therefore, aimed to reassure the native citizens, the only holders of voting rights, about the priority of their status compared to that of outsiders, and to communicate that they are actively defended from the ‘invasion’ of urban space, by which they feel threatened (Ambrosini 2012).

The attempt to exclude immigrants from some rights met with opposition from experts in law and also from the courts, which passed judgments against the by-laws. The Association of Pro Bono Lawyers, but also other lawyers involved in the trials justified their accusations based on the defence of certain rights.

Specifically, the by-laws violated the inalienable rights of people, such as the freedom of religion or personal freedom, the right to education, the right to move (Lorenzetti 2010b). But sometimes they also violated welfare rights. Although in this case it is more difficult to define those who have these rights and those who do not because of their cost for society. There are some essential health services that should be guaranteed for everyone (Ravelli 2010). The lawyers also said that the by-laws were illegal because they did not respect the Italian Constitution and the immigration law (l. n. 40/1998), which affirm that “it is considered discrimination any behaviour that, directly or indirectly, involves distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin, religious beliefs and practices, and that has the purpose or the effect of destroying or compromising the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and of fundamental freedom in political, economic, social, and cultural life and in any other field of public life” (art. 41, l. 40/1998).

This is the frame used in courts, where the Association of Pro Bono Lawyers, usually in collaboration with the trade unions, fought against the by-laws. But this is also the frame the courts used to condemn the local policies of exclusion: in almost all the judgements the reason why the by-laws were banned was the fact that they were discriminatory and they damaged the fundamental rights of immigrants.

An interesting aspect that emerges in the interviews is the idea that the by-laws are a symptom of something bigger, i.e. a general climax of discrimination which materializes in many aspects of social life and in everyday social relations:

“The legal thinking but also the cultural thinking of both left and right wing political formations is that they always start from the assumption of “we” and “they”. That is, they don’t try to find a

legislative procedure to facilitate the “integration processes”...if we want to use this term, even though I do not love it...in short, the “processes of responsible co-existence between people”. It's all about: the tax on residence permits to collect money, retirement on which there is not enough information, i.e. on the possibility for foreign citizens receiving it according to bilateral agreements among countries. In short, there is a lot of information given that creates an enemy. And the whole thinking is based on this, on this thing. And then you take for granted that the by-law on the kebab shop owners is to protect local trade. But...it means that there is something...the class C and class A citizens. So the by-laws are a corollary of a climate that is built and functional...” ( CF, member of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition).

In CF's opinion the tendency to distinguish between “we” and “they” is also evident in the legislation on immigration, which hinders the process of integration. The local policies of exclusion contribute to strengthening this climax and to legitimising certain discriminatory discourses.

GT, a member of a no-profit association which deals with immigrants, suggested that this approach to immigrants can be easily shared by citizens, who think they are threatened by the presence of foreigners, especially in a period characterized by social and economic crisis. Nevertheless, the effects are serious:

“The by-laws are very effective but in my opinion they have very serious effects, because beyond the stupidity of the by-law itself, the message is very serious. The fact that an institution, which by its very nature should handle public affairs, because it is above all and in defence of everyone, takes a position like this, i.e. legitimizes attitudes, thoughts, ways of doing things... and in daily life people might be fed up of experiencing injustices or being cast aside ...it becomes a cultural thing. There is a heavy cultural effect, i.e. division, in other words “us” and “them” ” (GT, member of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition, Milan).

The effects are visible in everyday life, especially in the relations between immigrants and social services. GT declared that front desk officers often have prejudices and do not give certificates to immigrants because they are foreigners. This was the case for a Syrian man with dual Italian and Syrian citizenship who asked for a health services card but he was refused it because the clerk said that his passport was false.

Besides that, in Italian legislation there are some old rules and laws which are not appropriate now, in a society which has become multicultural. The case in point is the law regarding public sector jobs which states that only Italian citizens can be employed in the public sector. When the law was written the aim was to “defend the interests and the superiority of the nation”, as the lawyer FA explained. But now the law is inappropriate and the effect is that of discrimination against immigrants:

“In my opinion there is discrimination because our legislation has not yet been modified, changes have not yet been made...because parliament, the government make laws, so it is not really true that there are no political reasons...if the state integrated immigrants in all aspects of their lives, those who come here, live, work, produce, are part of our country...in the end everything is linked to the culture of a country, because...because probably, I know, there is not a great deal of willingness...” (FA, lawyer and lawyer volunteer for CGIL Milano).

The cultural climax legitimises certain behaviour and attitudes of Italians, who consider and treat immigrants as workers and not as human beings. FA outlined that the defence of their rights is easier in the big factories or in public services than within little factories:

“The employer says: ‘Today you’re here and tomorrow there is another worker, it makes no difference to me, because I need a labour force’...this is the problem. So, the problem is the context where a person works. All people have rights, theoretically all people have rights. The difficulty is applying the law. Even for us as lawyers, it is much easier to defend a person who works in the public services, in a large factory. Defending a person who works in construction, or in trade, small businesses, bars...it is more difficult” (FA, lawyer and lawyer volunteer for CGIL Milano).

Discrimination occurs not only in the labour market, but also in other fields. The interviewees quoted some discriminatory episodes which are part of this general climax: the “for rent” signs which excluded immigrants for renting in two cities, Rome and Gerezano (a little city near Milan) or the political posters on which slogans like “We don’t want Milan to become a gypsy city/an Islamic city”, which were posted around Milan during the political campaign for the election of the mayor in 2011.

In this context the by-laws might obtain consensus from Italians, who feel protected by the institutions and feel that their rights are defended. This is also the reason why the by-laws made the news when they were introduced, whereas there was no news when they were condemned in the courts: their cultural message was more important than their actual enforcement<sup>101</sup>.

In conclusion, the main frame used by civil society actors who oppose the local policies of exclusion is the defence of fundamental human rights. These policies in fact violate the unalienable rights of people, such as personal freedom or the freedom of worship. The interviewees distinguish between “us” and “them”, but in this case “us” consists of all those who defend global justice and equality, who fight for the respect of human rights; “them” are those who sustain and promote the local policies of exclusion and who are considered oppressive, antidemocratic, because they do not respect the fundamental rights of people. Thanks to this frame, the civil society actors fight against the local policies of exclusion and reinforce their identity as the upholders of democratic values and rights. Moreover, the construction of this identity proves particularly effective for some in an historical context in which the traditional political references are weakened.

#### **4.7. Conclusion: municipal xenophobia and multiethnic society**

Immigration is not usually accepted in a peaceful way by the receiving societies. In the last few years, the politicization of the issue, its growing importance on the political agenda, the influence of international political events, such as the terrorist attacks in U.S. and Europe, have created a tendency to tighten the rules of entry and residence in the receiving countries (Balibar 2006), to be more rigorous towards irregular migrants (Engbersen and Broeders 2009), to demand new ways of assimilating immigrants culturally (Joppke 2007). Moreover, in several European countries new political formations have been created, which draw up political programs that are explicitly hostile towards immigrants and cultural and religious minorities (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008).

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<sup>101</sup> For the same reason many by-laws introduced in some municipalities were copied in others, although they had already been condemned in court. The main aim was to spread and reinforce anti-immigrant messages and discourses, rather than enforce the by-law.

They have often achieved significant electoral victories, consequently causing a hardening of the positions of the traditional conservative parties, which are particularly threatened by the loss of consensus.

The Italian case fits into this scenario, while heightening the contradictions. The country has received over 5 million immigrants in just over twenty years, employing about 3 million immigrants in various ways. Several economic sectors depend to a greater or lesser degree on immigrants' work, not to mention their contribution to the "invisible welfare" of domestic services and care in families. By contrast, on the cultural and political level, most Italians have reacted negatively to the transformation of the country in a multi-ethnic sense (Valtolina 2010), giving their support to political forces and programs which are explicitly hostile towards immigrants and religious minorities. This is particularly evident in the wealthiest and most modern regions of the country, those which actually receive the largest number of immigrants (Ambrosini 2011).

We could therefore reassert that in the last few years Italy has taken some steps backwards in terms of openness to cultural and religious pluralism. The local policies which we have considered in our analysis are a significant example of this. They fit into a specific context, that of an important region (over 9 million inhabitants) where the Northern League has prominent roles in many local governments, and has effectively imposed the approach to be adopted by the centre-right coalitions (Cento Bull 2010).

However, the local policies of exclusion suggest a broader range of considerations. The policies of exclusion in the Lombardy region indicate an unease throughout Europe as well as in the U.S. (Hagan, Rodriguez and Castro 2011).

The first observation concerns the political use of xenophobia. At a time of economic crisis, political forces and local governments may be tempted to seek a low-cost consensus exacerbating tension between natives and new residents. The main cultural and symbolic effect of the local policies of exclusion is to mark the boundaries between "we" and "they", between the legitimate "owners of the land" and newcomers who expect to settle. Local authorities present themselves as the defenders of the community against a hypothetical invasion by foreigners, who are threatening citizens in three ways: personal safety and public order; the distribution of benefits by a local welfare system whose resources are already limited; the cultural and religious identity of the country. The enforcement of these measures and their implementation, the ability to achieve the promised results become secondary issues: the impact is essentially rhetorical, the real purpose is to obtain the consensus of the voters, i.e. Italian citizens.

Besides that, local authorities demonstrate their power to tolerate (King, 1976) through local policies of exclusion: tolerance is possible and it is exercised when immigrants do not damage the "social cohesion". The basis of social cohesion is solidarity and solidarity is possible when values, norms and beliefs are shared. Nevertheless, solidarity is not feasible if there is too great a difference (Shiffauer, forthcoming). Because the risk is the disintegration of society, claims for difference should not be tolerated, even though they should be tolerated in the name of liberalism. The possibility to open kebab shops in the city centres is a case in point. Economic freedom is linked to the right, to private property and initiatives, and it is the fundamental basis of a liberal system. Nevertheless, it is obstructed through the local policies of exclusion because it could threaten social and cultural cohesion, permitting the opening of new shops which highlight the establishment of cultural practices which are different from the traditional Italian ones. A national narrative prevails, i.e. the "unity of the nation" narrative (Shiffauer, *ibid.*).

Besides claims that should not be tolerated, in local authorities' discourses other claims must not be tolerated, because they infringe on the rights of Italians. Receiving social benefits and being sustained by the welfare state are rights of citizens, not of foreigners. Immigrants' demands (e.g. to have access to bonus for new babies in the same way as Italians) must be therefore stopped. Finally, other claims cannot be tolerated because tolerating them is a risk to urban security. The permission to

build places of worship is a case in point. This claim cannot be tolerated because to allow certain actions and practices is potentially harmful to society, especially when the claim is made by Muslims.

The domain of non toleration lies on the boundaries of what *should not* be tolerated, *must not* be tolerated and *cannot be tolerated*. The policies of exclusion are therefore a message that risks legitimizing other more serious forms of intolerance, hostility and discrimination (Ambrosini 2012).

A worrying consideration follows: fundamental democratic institutions, such as the citizens' votes, freedom of expression and the value of local autonomies can be manipulated in order to legitimize institutionalized forms of discrimination and intolerance. The literature on local policies for immigrants has so far emphasized mainly good practices and progress compared to the national regulations (e.g. CLIP Network 2010), but we also have to pay attention to the policies of closure and their cultural effects (see Mahnig 2004).

Political conflict about the measures concerning immigrant minorities, however, highlight that the local policies serve as a field of confrontation between social actors and between different opinions, which is open to undefined outcomes. The presence of controlling institutions is important (e.g. the authorities of the state and especially the magistrates) and particularly the vivacity of a heterogeneous advocacy coalition which defends immigrants.

Their defence is based on the necessity to guarantee human rights. In their discourses and practices the concepts of tolerance, respect or recognition are not used, but their position is more radical: the issue at stake is not to draw boundaries among what should/must/can/could be tolerated, respected and recognised, but to protect people from being damaged in their basic human rights, such as the freedom of religion, the right to own private property and economic activities, personal freedom. Human rights must be guaranteed, any debate is therefore meaningless.

Radical social movements, traditional trade unions, voluntary associations, associations of lawyers which are socially active and the Catholic institutions are all on the same side, and oppose the policies of exclusion. Some of these social forces pay the costs and they have to deal with problems of internal consensus: among members of trade unions xenophobic attitudes can be perceived such as within the Catholic Church the official pro-immigrant approaches are in contrast with widely shared thoughts among believers, within some associations and in some of the clergy.

The commitment of these social forces, which is firm and coherent towards the most open forms of discrimination, can weaken when the policies of closure take on more nuanced and ambiguous traits (e.g. when the policies claim to defend the rights of women or children against patriarchal traditions which are ascribed to immigrant families, typically Muslim families).

In any case, the struggle over immigration policies is also an important device for identity purposes: it helps to define them as strenuous defenders of human rights, against the forces that rule many towns, counties and regions in Northern Italy.

An aspect that remains weak in the Italian experience is related to the political protagonism of migrants and their associations. Their ability to intervene in local policy issues has so far been scarce. The legal difficulty of obtaining citizenship and the right to vote, even locally, is certainly a serious obstacle. The fragility of immigrant associations, which are not well supported by public funding, is one consequence. At the same time it helps to explain the weakness of the immigrants' voices. It is generally only through indirect channels, such as trade unions, that some immigrants have so far been able to obtain a public role.

The development of the values of tolerance and of cultural and religious pluralism in Italy therefore needs a watchful and combative civil society. The fact that immigrants' rights are defended by important social actors of Italian society, such as trade unions and the Catholic Church, has contributed to producing significant progress as regards regularization procedures, family reunions and the legal safeguards of resident immigrants. Nevertheless, immigrants should have a more important role as political actors. There is still a lack of stronger participation of immigrants and their



associations in the public debate and in the local governance of those processes regarding the transformation of Italian society in a multiethnic sense.

## **5. Concluding remarks**

The issue of cultural and religious pluralism in Italy has become important in the public and political arena in the last few years, because of the settlement of immigrants coming from several European and non-European countries.

Compared to other countries, Italy was a state with an uncertain national identity, because of the presence of important regional identities, with many different dialects. Despite the long and turbulent process of becoming a Unitarian national state, Italy finally became a unified country in 1861. Only several decades later, in order to guarantee equality for all minorities and to avoid secessionist tendencies, the Italian state signed various agreements with religious and linguistic native minorities.

Today the widely accepted representation of Italy is that of a relatively homogeneous ethnic and linguistic country, with some regional differences and with small linguistic and religious native minorities that are formally recognised and accepted. The national identity is intertwined with Catholicism, even though this link has lost much of its importance in recent decades. The perception of Italian cultural homogeneity was reinforced in a reaction to immigration flows, which started about 25 years ago and increased rapidly over the following decades.

The arrival of foreign people was spontaneous, unforeseen and largely unregulated. Immigrants started to enter the labour market and local contexts, at the bottom, and much later employment of immigrants was recognised by public institutions and became regulated judicially. The discrepancy between the labour market (where the economic integration of migrants was promoted) and migration policies led to governments introducing the regularization acts, which are the principal instruments used to regularize migrants. Even though immigrants are accepted and economically integrated – albeit in a subordinate integration – in the labour market, their cultural or religious diversity is not easily accepted. The media and some political parties reflect and reinforce this approach.

So, despite the fact that Italy is becoming an increasingly multi-ethnic society, opposition to and refusal of immigrants increase. This phenomenon depends partly on public and political discourses which are formulated and justified by some political parties. Among these, the Northern League plays a major role, with its anti-immigrant discourses and a political programme based on the proposal to close borders to new immigrants and to impose cultural assimilation on legally resident immigrants. The increasing power of the Northern League contributed to the development of intolerant attitudes towards migrants and also became part of the political programmes of other parties. The electoral campaign conducted by the centre-right political alliance (of which the Northern League was part) was also based on intolerance of immigrants. After its victory, the new government introduced the so-called “security package”, a set of regulations which includes more severe sanctions against immigrants, especially illegal residents<sup>102</sup>. Even though the security package had a symbolic impact more than effective consequences, it contributed to the spread of negative attitudes towards migrants and an increasing need to defend national identity and borders.

Nevertheless, in opposition to anti-immigrant discourses, more tolerant or pro-immigrant discourses and movements increased among the public. A part of the civil society, formed mainly by people who had been involved in immigrants’ integration for many years (such as NGOs, charities, churches, trade unions), started to fight against intolerance and racism in a more active way, e.g.

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<sup>102</sup> The anti-immigrant discourses and initiatives have decreased in the last two years. This is probably linked to the decrease in power and consensus of the Northern League, because of its defeat in the last administrative election (2011) and of the recent scandals over the misuse of public money by some members of the party.

organizing demonstrations against the security package or dragging Northern League politicians through the courts.

Opposition to intolerance is conducted not only through these kinds of actions but also through everyday practices, which are carried out in local contexts thanks to civil society actors involved in immigration issues. Since the first immigration flows, charities, trade unions and organizations linked to the Catholic church have supported migrants by offering them social services and legal protection.

In addition to this, in some institutional contexts, reactions to anti-immigrant discourses developed and inclusive approaches emerged. A case in point was the mobilization of doctors and health staff against a rule introduced by the security package, i.e. the obligation of reporting irregular migrants who ask for assistance to the police. Many medical organizations, such as the Federation of all Italian medical associations, the medical Association of psychologists, the Italian Observatory on Global Health, the Italian Society of Paediatrics organized demonstrations and petitions to fight against the rule, and finally they obtained its repeal.

But tolerant or even inclusive approaches also emerged in other institutional contexts, such as the education system. In contrast to a political climate characterized by intolerant discourses, the education system has produced documents and instructions aimed at favouring foreign students' integration since the '80s-'90s. At that time the Italian school population started becoming ethnically diverse because of the growing number of immigrant children.

Despite the education system undergoing various reforms, introduced by both right-wing and left-wing governments, which were motivated mostly by political and ideological reasons, a fundamental principle has always dominated, i.e. universalism. In Italian schools, an egalitarian and inclusive approach dominates: all students are considered to be equal, they have the same rights and they have to be respected equally. The principle of universalism was also applied to students of foreign origin. The right to be educated is recognised and guaranteed to foreign students, regardless of their citizenship, their legal status or that of their parents. It is worth noting here that the reception of foreign children by Italian schools regardless of their legal status occurred in local contexts and was locally introduced by some head-teachers; it then became a practice of some Provincial Education Offices, and it finally became law (Zincone 1999a).

Universalism ensures equal opportunities for all students regarding access to the education system, academic performance and curriculum guidance. For these reasons, students of foreign origin are included in mainstream classes and they are treated as Italians.

Nevertheless, the management of the education of children of foreign origin is not always easy. These students have in fact another mother-tongue, they are sometimes used to a different education system, and their families have different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the Italian education system has had to introduce various innovations specifically for foreign students. Besides language courses and short-term remedial lessons for those who do not know Italian, changes to curricula and to everyday school life have also been made. The principle behind these changes is that of *interculturalism*, a concept which became salient in the school context, discourses and official documents and is now the basis of education.

By using the term interculturalism, the Italian education system seeks to outline the importance of dialogue and exchange among people who are culturally different, in order to avoid conflict and to favour coexistence. *Intercultural education* is seen as the most important way of preventing racism and intolerance, of supporting democratic values and finally of favouring integration. Interculturalism has become the normal approach to teaching in schools and has been integrated into regular school programmes. It is now considered the main way to achieve integration among students of different origins at school. Other concepts, such as tolerance or acceptance are not considered, discussed or thematised among education staff and teachers, because they alone can not favour integration. Integration can be achieved only when diversities are recognised, evaluated and exchanged.

Despite the inclusive documents written and published by the Ministry of Education, through our research we found out that the concept of interculturalism is quite vague and generic: despite being well-intentioned, it can be interpreted in various ways. It promotes cultural dialogue and exchange, the recognition and appreciation of differences, but it does not explain how to do this concretely.

So, in everyday practices teachers interpret it in various ways, according to their personal experiences and beliefs, the circumstances and situations and the school's attitude. Among teachers there is a broad consensus about the meaning of the concept at an ideological level, they believe firmly in it and try to apply it in everyday school life and in the curricula, e.g. introducing references to the countries of origin of foreign students in the lessons or celebrating their festivals. Nevertheless, there are differences in its practical applications due to its vagueness.

A second set of problems regards the difficulties in enforcing the intercultural approach in some situations and everyday experiences. Despite the fact that teachers share the approach, they sometimes find it hard to apply. For example, some foreign families' demands are hard to tolerate because in teachers' opinions they undermine the universalistic approach of the Italian school system (e.g. the demand to pray at specific times during the school day) or they damage children's rights or well-being (e.g. fasting during Ramadan). In these cases the recognition and appreciation of differences are enforced with difficulty, and teachers react with an attitude of minimal tolerance (Walzer 1997), grudgingly accepting foreign families' claims.

In other situations teachers' behaviours collide with their beliefs and principles. Even though they think that interculturalism is part of their background and education style, they often fall back on a Western ethnocentric view of thinking. This occurs when teachers have to interpret the behaviours of foreign children or of their parents: behaviours are justified through culturally constructed explanations, prejudices and stereotypes that are culturally constructed and unintentionally used. For example some children's habits, i.e. to slouch while they are having lunch, to belch, not to respect women teachers (we are referring to Muslim boys), are explained culturally, and other types of explanations are overlooked (e.g. the need to attract attention for many reasons, the lack of rules for social behaviour). Teachers often say "They do things this way, they behave in this way because it is in their culture", and based on this consideration they explain or justify children's behaviour, without considering that their explanations could be influenced by their culturally given thoughts and opinions.

So, despite the broad consensus about intercultural education, if we look at the actions and behaviour of teachers, we can note that their attitudes swing from interculturalism to intercultural acceptance, to tolerance and more rarely to an attitude of closure or resistance.

Interculturalism occurs in everyday practices when teachers talk about the countries of origin of the students, use fairy tales known by all the children, talk about different religions in their lessons, explain and celebrate foreign students' festivals with all students<sup>103</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting here that the introduction of these references in curricula depends on the teachers' sensitivity and willingness to mention them. In fact, at the institutional level, in-depth discussion on how to broaden curricula has not yet been carried out: the adoption of new textbooks which represent everybody, the inclusion of foreign authors in the curricula and the study of subjects from different points of view have not yet been considered and discussed. Secondly, intercultural acceptance occurs when students' cultural and religious practices are accepted and allowed. To be absent at lunchtime during Ramadan, wearing a headscarf at school and being absent during the festivals are accepted and permitted if they do not affect the organization and the pace of school life. If they do so, they are not tolerated and consequently they are banned. For example the demand to pray in dedicated rooms during school time is not accepted because it would entail a re-organization of the school's spaces and time, and it would be in conflict with the principle of

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<sup>103</sup> Actually, this strategy is sometimes discussed and debated among education staff. The risk in highlighting students' differences is to hurt those who claim the "right to be similar", i.e. not to emphasize their diversity.

universalism (favouring a minority would mean treating some students differently). Intercultural acceptance occurs, therefore, only to a certain extent. Thirdly, tolerance prevails when some demands from foreign families made informally and locally are tolerated, although they might be considered wrong. In these situations minimal tolerance and a sort of resignation “for the sake of peace” (Walzer 1997) are adopted. The Muslim parents’ attitude towards their girls is a case in point. The prohibition on going to the swimming pool with classmates or to go on a school trip is not acknowledged as a reasonable demand, on the contrary it is considered damaging for children’s well-being (who are excluded from an activity in which all students participate). But in these cases teachers have to accept foreign parents’ claims and consequently tolerate them. Finally there are some cases in which teachers do not tolerate them, and express an attitude of closure or resistance, i.e. when they think that students’ rights are not being respected due to their parents’ demands, wishes and attitudes. For example, the severe education style of some parents is tolerated (although criticized) as long as it does not damage children’s rights and well-being. In some rare and extreme cases excessively aggressive behaviour is condemned and drastic measures are taken by teachers against the parents.

In the case of the Muslim school in Milan, the main attitude of civil society actors is of minimal toleration: because it is not possible to ignore minorities’ claims, the best solution is to accommodate them and reduce the negative effects to a minimum. Consequently, the request to build their own school was heard, but minorities had to respect Italian rules. Besides that, self segregation has to be avoided. Minimal toleration or timid opposition to the faith schools are justified because of the necessity to defend children’s well-being.

In conclusion, despite a general political climate characterized by intolerance towards immigrants and a national context with restrictive national policies on immigration issues<sup>104</sup>, at local level experiences of exchange, respect and recognition do occur. This is particularly evident in the school system where the intentions are good: interculturalism is the main value, and it is promoted both at national level, by the Ministry of Education, and at local level, within Italian schools. It is more difficult to put it into practice on a daily basis, but teachers try to recognise and appreciate the differences of students. When they can not enforce interculturalism, they at least try to adopt intercultural acceptance or toleration. In some cases intolerance emerges, but this is rare and it concerns parents’ claims rather than the relations with foreign students.

The issue of political participation and representation of minorities is more critical. In contrast with the institutional context of education, the context of politics is less inclusive and less willing to change the rules in order to favour the political participation and representation of migrants. Migrants currently have few political rights. The citizenship law is, for example, the most restrictive in EU15. Besides that, the various immigration laws introduced from the ’90s until today have not dealt with the political participation and representation of migrants and they have not provided legislative changes in order to introduce political rights for migrants (even at local level). These restrictions and the unwillingness to change the law depend partly on the political climate: the issues of security and control were central in the political programmes of the right-wing coalition (especially of the Northern League party) and influenced its victory in the 2008 elections (by contrast, in the 2011 administrative elections there was a turnaround). The political programmes of the right-wing coalition consisted of the need to combat the illegal flow of migrants (see chapter 2), fight against crime and repress public disorder, defend local cultural identities, and give priority to Italian citizens in accessing welfare services (see chapter 4).

The local level often tries to compensate for the limitations and shortcomings of national policies, moving away from the national models (Alexander 2003) or even contradicting them. Many services and resources for citizens are delivered locally, so the possibility of using them for

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<sup>104</sup> The citizenship law is a case in point. The Italian citizenship law is in fact the most restrictive in the Eu-15 context. It is based on *ius sanguinis* and states that citizenship can be obtained after 10 years residence for non Eu nationals and after 4 years residence for Eu nationals.

immigrants depends on decisions, organizational processes and ordinary practices that are developed locally, in the education system, in housing policies, in assistance to families in difficulty and in employment services (Ambrosini 2012). Local policies are usually seen as more inclusive, aimed at promoting measures and interventions for the benefit of immigrant populations (Pennix et al. 2004).

Even in the case of policies regarding migrants' political participation, some local contexts have promoted the inclusion of migrants. Some Regions and Municipalities, for example, have modified their Statutes autonomously to give migrants the right to vote. Nevertheless, these modifications were rejected by the State Council which declared that national institutions rather than local bodies should cover the issue of voting rights.

In addition to this, immigrant associations have little power in influencing Italian political life. These associations were created by immigrants firstly to satisfy cultural, social and religious needs of migrants, to promote the cultural identity of their members and to sustain their integration. Their political participation is a second aim and it is usually exercised by providing a basis for political support to community leaders elected by immigrants, or by assuming the role of an advocacy group, often through the intermediation of Italian organizations (Carpo et al. 2003; Meli, Enwereuzor 2003; Caselli, Grandi 2010, 2011). Besides that, immigrants' associations are fragmented, lack a framework of institutionalization, and have no social visibility. For all these reasons they are not suitable for representing migrants politically. Consequently, migrants' participation in the public arena generally occurs through the intermediation of Italian associations and organizations, i.e. no-profit and voluntary organizations, and trade unions. These organizations initially offered assistance and legal protection to migrants, facilitated their regularization as residents and workers and their access to social services. Now migrants are also enrolled in trade unions and some hold positions within them. So, besides a national context which is restrictive and local contexts which have no power in influencing national policies, some social actors from civil society (trade unions, NGOs and charity organizations) defend migrants' rights and interests. They play an important role in promoting migrants' integration and supporting their rights/claims, even though their actions have encountered many obstacles in the last few years. Most of the difficulties were due to the introduction of measures that exclude and discriminate against migrants in many local contexts, i.e. the "local policies of exclusion" (chapter 4). So, besides the traditional concept of local policies as more open approaches than the national ones, in Italy the opposite occurred, i.e. the growth of local policies which are more constraining than the national ones. Again, the political climate spread by the Northern League party and adopted by the right-wing coalition contributed to this worsening of the local policies. An important aspect related to this issue is the introduction of the Security Package, i.e. a set of norms introduced by the Berlusconi government in 2008 and 2009, in which the cities' mayors obtained more power: they could autonomously introduce measures in order to guarantee urban safety, without any approval at national level. So many municipalities, mostly governed by the Northern League or by right-wing coalitions, began to introduce local regulations to maintain public order, guarantee urban standards, defend citizens from crime, danger, annoying or indecent behaviour. Most of them actually targeted migrants directly or indirectly.

It was also on this occasion that the civil society actors took steps to fight against these discriminatory measures. They played an important role both in the public arena, where they tried to raise public awareness about the issue, and in the legal arena, taking the local administrations which introduced the local policies of exclusion to court. The main frame used by them to oppose these policies was that of discrimination: the measures introduced by some city governments are discriminatory, they damage fundamental human rights, such as the freedom of religion, personal freedom, equality among people. Human rights must be guaranteed, and are not open to debate or subject to political discretion. This is also the frame used in courts, and it has often been cited in judgments condemning the local policies. It is interesting to note that the civil society actors never express their opposition to local policies quoting the concept of tolerance: the issue at stake is not to tolerate the presence of foreign people, but to protect them from having their basic human rights compromised.

By contrast, the frames used by city governments to justify their discriminatory measures are formulated so as to appeal to Italian citizens, hiding their discriminatory aims and intolerant approaches. The first frame is about urban safety and decency: some local policies are justified because they guarantee citizens' security and preserve urban decorum and social order, e.g. the controls on places of worship or checks on the conditions of houses in the city centres. The second frame is the scarcity of economic and social resources: the local policies are necessary because the social benefits have been reduced, so they have to be set aside only for Italians or for those who have been residents in the town for a long period (e.g. bonus for babies reserved only for babies born to Italian parents). Only Italian citizens have the right to access some social and economic benefits, whereas immigrants have to be excluded because they are "guests". Finally, the third frame is about the defence of Italian identity, culture and traditions. The prohibition on opening mosques, new kebab shops or to ban non traditional activities in the city centres is a case in point. Here the local policies are justified because they defend the Italian (and local) culture from immigrants, who are perceived as invaders. They are seen as necessary to avoid contamination and changes in Italian cities, culture and habits. The three frames are well-structured and they favourably impress Italian citizens. They hold the interests and rights of natives, intervening in issues that affect the daily life of people and their locally lived experiences.

If we deeply analyse the issue by taking into account the data collected in our research, we can affirm that the local policies of exclusion are "institutionalized forms of intolerance": they are drawn up and enforced by legitimate bodies (i.e. the Municipalities), which are elected democratically and which influence social life within the local communities. They are institutional obstacles to the rights of several minorities (civil, social) and to their freedom of expressing their cultural and religious identity. Besides the fact that they are formulated and approved within democratic institutions, they are easily justified because they defend citizens under three aspects: personal safety and public order, the distribution of economic and social benefits, the cultural and religious identity of the country. However, they actually legitimize xenophobic attitudes and behaviours, and have symbolic and cultural effects: they mark the boundaries between "us" and "them", between the legitimate "owners of the land" and newcomers who expect to settle.

Taking into account the data from the research and looking at Italian history, the ways the country has dealt with immigration, the recent historical, political, social and economic developments, we can affirm that in the last few years signs of openness to cultural and religious pluralism have decreased alongside an increase in closure and hostility towards ethnic minorities. The local policies of exclusion are a significant example of this. But the lack of national reforms on citizenship is another example. It is a paradox that, in view of the increase in the foreign population living in Italy, the citizenship law has not yet been changed to facilitate and shorten the process of naturalization, particularly for the second generations.

The European context has surely influenced the national context: the terrorist attacks, Islamophobia, the general climate characterized by insecurity, the growth of xenophobic attitudes and the increasing power of populist parties have contributed to the spread of anti-immigrant discourses.

Italy, however, especially in the richer regions and cities, is experiencing a profound contradiction in its relationship with the immigrant component of its population: in fact, the country is becoming more and more multi-ethnic, in terms of the number of residents, participation in the labour market, transition to self-employment, mixed marriages, and the origin of students in schools. In their cultural representations, most Italians tend to deny this reality. They do not want multi-ethnic cities. Faced with the growth of a multiethnic society, in fact, the prevailing opinion rejects the idea of giving a place to immigration in the nation's social organization, and this position is strengthened by political forces and by the media that reflect and exacerbate the reaction. Tensions between political closure and economic openness towards new immigration and diversity arise throughout all developed countries. In the last few years in the Italian case, these contradictions have touched the highest levels: the definition of immigration as a problem of safety and public order, the tightening of rules

that aim to combat irregular immigration and the backlash against cultural and religious differences have become central aspects in the prevailing political discourse. However, as we have seen, the actual practices do not correspond to the rhetoric: the six amnesties in 22 years speak of a labour market that in the end has always forced governments to recognize the de facto inclusion of unauthorized immigrants in the economic system. Cultural diversity, while not openly welcomed, has implicitly entered into the everyday life of the country. Various institutions, from schools, to public services, to local authorities, have had to face a growing diversity in their public. Without greater commitment, greater realism towards the relationship between politics, economy, labour market needs, and human rights, and a different public rhetoric on immigration, the country will continue to flounder dangerously in the tension between aversion on principle and de facto evolution towards a multi-ethnic future.

For several years, with a peak between 2008 and 2010, political messages about security, openly hostile towards immigrants, gained undeniable electoral support in Italy. Now the results of recent local elections (spring 2011 and 2012), and especially the vote in Milan, seem to indicate a reversed tendency. It is as if the slogans against mosques and Roma areas no longer hold much interest. It is too early to say whether the xenophobic impulses are out of fashion or whether a different political vision of interethnic relations is being formed, but it is legitimate to note that the culture of exclusion is no longer dominant.

We should stress, however, that in Europe, even in countries with long traditions of liberalism and openness, such as the Netherlands or Sweden, new populist and xenophobic political subjects are gaining political consensus. In Catalonia, several local governments have recently taken positions similar to those of the Italian cities governed by coalitions of the centre-right where the Northern League has a strong influence (Burchianti and Zapata Barrero 2012). In XXI century in Europe, the question of the reception and treatment of immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities is an increasingly hot topic on the political agenda.

Nevertheless, despite the popularity of intolerant discourses, in some contexts other attitudes prevail. We are referring to some local contexts, where inclusive approaches and a shared willingness to respect and recognize cultural and religious differences emerge.

The everyday multiculturalism (Colombo, Semi 2011) that occurs in some contexts is a case in point, e.g. the everyday relationships between Italians and foreign carers, mixed marriages, multiethnic markets. It is a “movement from below”, from civil society actors who firmly believe in the positive consequences (for both Italians and immigrants) of immigrants’ integration into Italian social, civil and cultural life. Among these actors, trade unions, NGOs, charities, organizations linked to the Catholic church, voluntary associations and radical social movements have set up an advocacy coalition which defends immigrants’ rights and interests, their only voice against the widespread intolerance of politicians and the public.

In addition to these civil society actors, other actors fight against intolerance and promote a more inclusive society: teachers and people who work in the education system. Even though they are part of a state institution and they have to follow the directives imposed from above, from the national level, they adhere to a model that is based on respect, recognition and appreciation of differences, i.e. interculturalism. Despite the fact that teachers sometimes have difficulty in enforcing it and fall back on attitudes of minimal tolerance, interculturalism is the shared approach, at least at a theoretical level.

Italy is still a long way from a real recognition of differences and from a real intercultural approach, but these watchful and combative civil society actors can support and promote the development of values of tolerance and of cultural and religious pluralism. Good attitudes and practices can spread, emerge from the local level and hopefully influence national policies on immigration.



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#### ***Nursery school enrolment***

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#### ***Using a foreign language in public places***

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***Family Allowance for new-borns***

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## **Annex 1**

### **List of interviews<sup>105</sup> on School Life**

**No 1, CC**, head teacher, Milan, 08/03/2011

**No 2, DA**, linguistic facilitator, Milan, 08/03/2011

**No 3, OM**, teacher and coordinator of linguistic facilitator, Milan, 15/03/2011

**No 4, IA**, head teacher, Milan, 15/03/2011

**No 5, CB**, head teacher, Milan, 30/03/2011

**No 6, RI**, linguistic facilitator, Milan, 4/04/2011

**No 7, RS**, linguistic facilitator, Milan, 4/04/2011

**No 8, CO** deputy head teacher and teacher, Milan, 6/04/2011

**No 9, SM**, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher, Milan, 6/04/2011

**No 10, TE**, linguistic facilitator and responsible for foreign students, Milan, 7/04/2011

**No 11, FC**, teacher, Milan, 12/04/2011

**No 12, ZA**, teacher and responsible for foreign students, Milan, 14/04/2011

**No 13, DR**, deputy head-teacher and teacher, Milan, 14/04/2011

**No 14, NE**, deputy head teacher and responsible for foreign students, Milan, 18/04/2011

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<sup>105</sup> Where the nationality it is not indicated, the interviewee is Italian.

**No 15, AB**, teacher, Milan, 19/04/2011

**No 16, EM**, responsible for interculturality at the Provincial Education Office, Milan, 6/05/2011

**No 17, MZ**, representative of an Italian association, Milan, 28/04/2011

**No 18, RA**, academic, Milan, 29/04/2011

**No 19, YG**, Egyptian teacher, Milan, 3/05/2011

**No 20, OM**, Egyptian responsible for the Via Ventura school, Milan, 10/05/2011

**No 21, US**, ex head teacher of via Ventura school, Milan, 11/05/2011

**List of participants to the discussion group on School Life**

**LT**, trade unionist, Anolf Lombardia (CISL) – trade union

**SF**, school teacher and trade unionist, CISL – trade union

**RP**, trade unionist, CGIL Milano – trade union

**AM**, school teacher and responsible for foreign students, state school

**DV**, responsible for immigrant office, Caritas Ambrosiana – no profit organization

**IN**, civil servant, Associazione islamica di Milano – Islamic association of Milan

**SC**, responsible for interculturality, Fondazione ISMU – no profit organization

**PB**, academic, Università Cattolica of Milan - University

**MC**, academic, Università Cattolica of Milan - University



## **List of interviews on Political Life**

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| No 1. EG  | male, lawyer and legal practitioner, professor of public law and administrative law at the university, interviewed on 25th November 2011, Milan               |
| No 2. MO  | male, lawyer and member of the Association of Pro-Bono Lawyers, actively involved in the trials against the by-laws, interviewed on 28th November 2011, Milan |
| No 3. BM  | male, member of CGIL (trade union) Brescia and of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition, interviewed on 19th December 2011, Brescia                     |
| No 4. SA  | male, member of CGIL Brescia and of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition, interviewed on 19th December 2011, Brescia                                   |
| No 5. MC  | male, member of CISL (trade union) Milan, Department of Immigration Policies, advocacy coalition, interviewed on 22nd December 2011, Milan                    |
| No 6. PI  | male, member of Caritas (a charity), Immigration Office, advocacy coalition, interviewed on 13th January 2012, Milan  |
| No 7. CF  | female, member of the no-profit association Arci, advocacy coalition, interviewed on 16th January 2012, Milan   |
| No 8. PL  | male, member of CGIL Milan, Department of Social Policies, advocacy coalition, interviewed on 16th January 2012, Milan  |
| No 9. GT  | male, member of a no-profit association, advocacy coalition, interviewed on 18th January 2012, Milan  |
| No 10. RM | male, City Councillor of the opposition (Democratic Party) in the Tradate municipality, interviewed on 21st January 2012, Tradate                             |
| No 11. SE | female, member of a no-profit association in Tradate, advocacy coalition, interviewed on 21st January 2012, Tradate   |
| No 12. AS | male, professor of constitutional law at the university, member of the Association for Law Studies, interviewed on 24th January 2012, Milan                   |
| No 13. FA | female, lawyer and volunteer lawyer for CGIL Milan, actively involved in the trials against the by-laws, interviewed on 26th January 2012, Milan              |
| No 14. NM | male, regional councillor of the Northern League, promoter of the so-called “Legge Harlem” (transl. Harlem law), interviewed on 12th April 2012, Milan        |
| No 14. SA | Male, city councillor of PDL (centre-right party) in Milan from 2006 to 2011, interviewed on 19 April 2012, Milan   |

## **Annex 2**

### **Interview guide on School Life**

#### **Key study 1: Preparatory classes**

##### **1. Characteristics of the school**

- How many students attend the school?
- How many are foreigners?
- How many were born in Italy to foreign parents?
- What are the most represented nationalities?
- How many foreign students are there compared to the total number of students per class?
- Has the number of foreign students increased, decreased or remained constant over the years?
- Are there differences between sections, i.e. foreign students are more concentrated in some sections and not in others, or is there equal distribution among sections and classes?

##### **2. Ways to handle the presence of foreign students**

- Are there any problems / obstacles / difficulties related to the presence of foreign students? If so, what are they?
- How did you resolve them? What steps have you taken?
- Did the solutions take the form of specific practices and rules to handle the cultural and religious diversity in the classroom? If so, which ones?
- How were rules constructed / practices adopted? What processes did you use to define some practices / rules?
- Did all teachers positively welcome practices / rules adopted?
- And the parents?
- Are they an integral part of your plans and your teaching approach or are they used only on specific occasions, in some classes by some teachers?
- When we talk about these practices / rules, which come immediately to your mind?
- Taking the example of Christmas, how do you handle the issue of Christmas in the classroom and at school, in the presence of pupils from other faiths?
- Have they been successful? If so, in what terms? If not, why not?
- Would you like to adopt better solutions or do you feel that the methods that your school has adopted are effective?
  - If you believe that there were better solutions, why have you not adopted them? Why, in your opinion, were they better than those that you have implemented?
  - If the methods used are effective, what are, in your opinion, the reasons for their success?

##### **3. Issue of preparatory classes and the regulation of the 30% limit**

###### **3.1 Preparatory classes**

- How do you evaluate the bill made by Cota on the need to introduce admission tests for foreign students and preparatory classes for those who do not pass the test?

- Do you consider that proposal positive or not? Why?
- What were, in your opinion, the principles and values underlying that proposal?
- In your opinion, was it an applicable bill? Feasible? Why?
- And, in your opinion, what could be a better solution than that proposal? Why?
- Following the proposal, did you in any way change your approach to the management of foreign students? Did anything change?

### **3.2 Limit 30%**

- What is your assessment of the Circular Letter 2010 on the limit of 30% in classes and even among schools?
- Do you consider this letter positive or not? Why?
- What are, in your opinion, the principles and values underlying this decision?
- What have been, in your opinion, the consequences of the letter, both in your school and at a more general level?
- Did the tension and controversy arising from this letter find a solution or not? Why?
- In some schools it was not possible to apply the limit of 30% and Minister Gelmini issued dispensations. In your school did you comply with the letter or did you ask for a dispensation? If so, why? If not, why?
- In general, how has the letter been acknowledged in your school? And by you in particular?
- Did anything change in your school after the Ministerial letter on the management of foreign students?
- Does your school agree with the decision taken by Gelmini or not? Why?
- Is the concentration of foreign students in some schools and classes, in your opinion, a real problem or not?
- If so, do you think there is a better solution to the decision of the limit at 30%? What? Why?
- In general, do you have ideas / suggestions / opinions on how to manage religious and cultural diversity of foreign students in the schools?

## **4 Intolerance, tolerance, acceptance, respect / recognition**

- In your opinion, what does tolerating cultural diversity at school mean?
- In your opinion, what types of diversity are tolerated at school?
- And what types are not tolerated? Why?
- What do you mean by “tolerance”?
- In your opinion, what types of diversity are respected and recognized at school?
- What do you mean by “respect” and “recognition”?
- What values and rules, in your opinion, promote tolerance in schools?
- And which ones do not promote it?

### **Key study 2: the Egyptian school**

#### **1. The key event: the Egyptian school of via Quaranta**

- What are, in your opinion, the salient events related to the founding-development-closure of the school in Via Quaranta?

- What are, in your opinion, the main events related to the founding-development-final solution proposed of the school in via Ventura?

## **2. Evaluation of the event**

- What is your opinion about the events related to the Egyptian school?
- How do you evaluate the decisions that were taken by the institutions over time?
- And how do you evaluate the choices made by those in the Islamic community involved in the event?
- In your opinion, what are the principles and values underlying the decision of this part of the Islamic community to create a school in Milan?
- And, in your opinion, what are the principles and values underlying the decision of the institutions to close the school?
- Do you think that the issue has been resolved and that the tensions arising from it have finished or not? Why?
- What are, in your opinion, the results and consequences of the choices made?
- Do you think it was possible to adopt a better solution? What? Why?
- In your opinion how was the issue of the Islamic school received in general by public opinion and civil society?
- And by the Islamic community involved in the matter?
- The aim is to capture the interviewee's opinion on the ways the issue of the school was handled, both from institutions and other social actors involved.

## **3. General evaluations regarding the management of cultural and religious diversity in the Italian education system**

- Do you think that in general in Italy the opportunity to exercise religious freedom is guaranteed? If so, how? If not, why?
- And in Italian schools, is the opportunity to exercise religious freedom guaranteed? If so, how? If not, why?
- Concretely what should we do to guarantee the religious freedom of individuals?
- And to guarantee that of children and their families at school?
- Consider the case of Christmas: In your opinion what should we do at school, how should we behave in the presence of non-Catholic students of religion?
- In relation to religious schools, do you think that they can be an effective way of guaranteeing religious freedom?
- Might there be alternatives to religious schools to guarantee and promote the practice of their religious diversity? What? Why?
- Does the establishment of a religious school, in your opinion, have other purposes and / or needs in addition to the purely religious ones? If so, what?
- What would you recommend to a family of foreign origin, to send their children to a public school or to a religious school?
- Do you think that all religious minorities have equal rights?
- In Milan, for example, there are Jewish schools, however, they haven't caused an uproar like the via Quaranta school. Why, in your opinion?
- In general do you have ideas / suggestions / opinions on the educational management of religious and cultural diversity of foreign students in schools?
- The aim is to investigate what the interviewee thinks about religious schools, and investigate whether they are an effective way of guaranteeing the freedom to profess a belief. We also want to investigate whether, in the opinion of the interviewee, there are differences in the

rights of various religious minorities to establish schools and if there are differences of treatment between them by the institutions.

#### **4. Intolerance, tolerance, acceptance, respect / recognition**

- In the international debate and in the European project ACCEPT, we adopt the term “tolerance” to indicate openness to religious and cultural minorities. What do you think?
- When we talk about tolerance, we can speak of tolerance towards minorities but also of internal tolerance among groups within the same minority, the community itself - in the case so far examined, of the Islamic one. How do you assess internal tolerance?
- In your opinion, what does tolerating cultural and religious diversity at school mean?
- In your opinion, what types of diversity are tolerated at school?
- And what are not tolerated? Why?
- What do you mean by “tolerance”?
- In your opinion, what types of diversity are respected and recognized at school?
- What do you mean by “respect” and “recognition”?
- Which values and rules, in your opinion, promote attitudes of openness in the school?
- And which do not promote them?
- In the case of the via Quaranta school how do you judge the attitude of the institutions? Tolerant or intolerant? Or would you call it otherwise? Why?
- And that of civil society? Why?

#### **Interview guide on Political Life**

Let's talk about those by-laws and measures that have been introduced at local level, in order to guarantee public order and security, and to prevent urban decay, but which directly or indirectly target immigrants.

##### **1. Historical contextualization of the policies of exclusion**

- In your opinion have these measures been introduced in a specific historical and/or political phase? If so, why? In your opinion what were the initial intentions of these by-laws? Was the main aim to guarantee security or to exclude immigrants from enjoying certain rights? Was security the actual emergency to cope with or was it a political emergency?
- Has the nature of these by-laws changed over time? And their content? Have by-laws been previously introduced which sought to target some specific rights or which sought to target all rights equally?
- Have the public and political discourses and frames on by-laws changed over time? And in what way?

##### **2. Spatial contextualization of the policies of exclusion and social actors involved**

- Where have the majority of these measures been introduced? Only at local level, in the municipalities or also at provincial and regional level? And do they have effects only at local level or also at the national level? And at the European level?
- Which social actors are involved? Are they always the same?
  - Are there some national or ethnic groups that are targeted more than others? If so, which ones? Why? How are they targeted? Or do these measures seek to target some categories and not others, e.g. irregular migrants rather than regular ones, women rather than men?
  - Are the administrations which introduce these by-laws of the North-League or are there also administrations of other political parties?
  - As far as you know, are there any civil society actors who fight against these by-laws? Who are they? What kind of activities do they organize to fight against the by-laws? Are there also immigrant associations which fight against the by-laws or are there only Italian associations?
- What are the frames that mayors use to justify the by-laws? How do they legitimate their frames?
- What frames are used by the civil society actors who oppose the by-laws in order to fight against them? How do they legitimate their frames?

### **3. The process used to deal with the local policies of exclusion and the final solutions**

- How does the process after the enactment of a by-law develop (who announces the by-law? Does it cause a great stir or not? Does it come into effect immediately? To whom is it announced? Who handles opposition to the by-law? What happens later? What do the injured parties achieve?
- How is the process concluded? Which solutions are adopted? What measures are taken? Have some by-laws been introduced and others not, or have all the by-laws been revoked?
- What are the reactions of mayors and citizens when the process is completed?
- How do you evaluate the decisions which are taken? In your opinion what are the values and the principles behind the decisions taken? Does the tension provoked by a by-law usually continue or not? Why? What might be a better decision? Why?

### **3. Discrimination, tolerance, intolerance....**

- In your opinion what is the main issue? Some think that the aim of the by-laws is to reassure the citizens-voters, to redefine the boundaries of the legitimate community, to distinguish between “us” and “them”. What do you think? Do you agree with this notion?
- How do you judge the by-laws?
- In your opinion, can the by-laws be reconciled with democratic values or not?
- How are they justified and legitimated within the democratic system?

In your opinion, regardless of their effective enforcement, do the by-laws have a certain rhetorical power? Do they have any cultural effects on citizens? How do they influence citizens?





